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APRIL 2015 #154



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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND



By the time you read this, I just may have chipped the last icicles off of my beard and crawled out from a particularly cold and snowy Toronto winter. Knotted with cabin fever, I want to escape the city – a desire amplified by the fact that I just watched the twelve-hour Ken Burns documentary series *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. A detailed history of the creation and protection of the world's first national parks that's full of stunning nature footage, it's got me thinking about my visits to the parks in Canada and how they shaped me – even as a horror fan.

One of the greatest gifts my parents ever gave me was travel. I've been to some amazing places around the world, but many of the best ones were within my own country. I consider many of these spaces sacred and I wouldn't be the same person I am without having visited them. Mom and dad indulged my dinosaur obsessions as a child by bringing me to Alberta's Dinosaur Provincial Park in the Badlands (pictured above) to see the fossilized remains of real monsters, they took me to the spooky Provincial Historic Site at Turtle Mountain, where, in 1903, 90 million tons of the mountain broke off and buried the town of Frank (killing nearly 100, most of whom remained in the rubble), and they always stopped at the side of the road in Banff and Jasper National Parks so I could observe bears and see firsthand the muscles rippling under the fur of animals that appear to earn their reputation as killing machines.

Those examples appeal to us denizens of the dark side, but the bedrock beauty and the grandeur of these places have just as much impact. At its most basic, the wild puts us back in touch with our primal selves, fears included. I've heard beasts howl in countless horror movies, but nothing has made the hair on the back of my neck stand up like the otherworldly yelps of a pack of coyotes echoing across a moonlit lake. I've never felt so afraid of the dark as when I turned off my headlamp while touring a mine (near Frank) and experienced a blackness so complete that I couldn't see my hand in front of my face.

These experiences only have enhanced my appreciation for the genre. The movie *The Descent* chills me on an additional level since I went into a cave and squeezed past boulders while encased in a labyrinthine subterranean world. While reading Richard Matheson's *The Shrinking Man*, I could imagine being doll-sized by recalling the time I stood next to a 1500-year-old redwood tree on Vancouver Island that was as thick as a house and tall as an apartment building. When I read an old vampire comic, the innocuous bats penciled in the frames for ambiance come alive in my head because I remember sitting on a campsite picnic table in the evening as they fed, swooping and squealing. And the best entry point into the world of giant monsters was seeing real dinosaur skeletons that were unearthed from Dinosaur Provincial Park and getting close enough to observe the serrations on those carnivorous teeth. And if you're a storyteller yourself, all of this stuff makes for exceptional nightmare fuel to fire the creative mind.

It's a great tragedy that humans seem better at destroying than creating, though. We excel at ravaging our landscapes for comfort and profit, but thankfully we've had the wherewithal to preserve some of the more special places that connect us to our history (and pre-history). Our first recorded stories include cave paintings of people facing off against prehistoric bears, sabretooth tigers and mammoths. Our narratives are deeply connected to nature and its life-and-death struggles, even if our stories are now shared via the flicker of projector light instead of firelight.

In an increasingly secular, virtual and consumer-driven world, where we relentlessly collect movies, toys, posters, autographs, etc., it's transcendent to leave those creature comforts behind for actual creatures, to stand at the bottom of a valley and allow yourself to become overwhelmed by the enormity of nature, as if the jaws of the mountains could snap shut and swallow you, to see firsthand the evidence of how temporary and fragile our attempts to conquer our surroundings are in the grand scheme of things. I need to feed the beast that's been scratching at my door all winter with these desires. (And I will, having already planned a few escapes to places where city lights don't stain the sky.)

John Muir, the famed naturalist whose passionate writings about his experiences outdoors were instrumental in the creation of the first national parks, said it best: "When one is alone at night in the depths of these woods, the stillness is at once awful and sublime."

Dave Alexander

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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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COVER: THE CHANGELING

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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



7TH DAY MADE IT into *Rue Morgue*'s 2014 Year in Review [*RM#152*] as the film with The Goriest Scene! Congratulations to Kaleigh Brown, Aftermath FX Studio, Dire Wit Films and everyone involved in the making of the film.

JASON KOCH, VIA FACEBOOK

ALWAYS A BIG FAN of your annual Horror Convention Schedule [*RM#152*] – it's an amazing and very valuable tool for rabid horror fans like me and my wife. We're planning our year now and hope to make it to Toronto in the fall! Long live *Rue Morgue*!

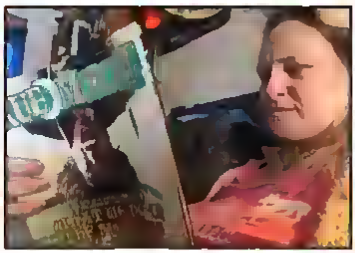
JARED AND NANCY WALSH – CLEVELAND, OHIO

I LOVED THE ARTICLE by Scott Essman titled "Monsters In Motion" [*RM#152*]. Ray Harryhausen planted a big seed that inspired legendary filmmakers like James Cameron, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. Harryhausen left his footprints on this planet that will stay with us into eternity.

PAUL DALE ROBERTS, ADDRESS WITHHELD

ME AND ONE of my dogs, Moose, reading the new issue. Awesome as always! Thank you!

JENNIFER GRIFFIND, VIA FACEBOOK



GOT YOUR *HORROR HEROES* book for Christmas. Love it! But no Bruce Campbell? Really? Where's The Chin?

@SCREAMINGSOUP1, VIA TWITTER

I HAVE BEEN AN AVID READER of your publication for many years, but it has become time to part ways. Unfortunately, your content has become increasingly dedicated to retrospective articles, even extending to unrelated non-horror fare such as *Ghostbusters* and *Twin Peaks*. The increasing dependence on well-trodden material is the same reason why I discontinued my subscription to *Famous Monsters of Filmland* when I was a teen. There are so many small horror features out which will deserve more coverage. These emerging horror directors may become the Raimi or Spielberg of the future. I can only imagine that they are suffering for any means of promoting their films and your magazine would serve as a perfect conduit. On a positive note, I loved the H.R. Giger tribute; it was long overdue and extremely well done in all respects. Farewell and best of luck to you. I hope some of my constructive criticism will guide your future efforts.

SCOTT B. ELKIND – SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

SO SORRY TO HEAR that Brian Clemens has passed away. He was a writer I looked up to, and I was thrilled that I was lucky enough to interview him for *RM#140*. R.I.P. Mr. Clemens and thanks for *The Avengers*, *See No Evil*, *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, *The Watcher in the Woods*, *And Soon the Darkness* and especially the TV series *Thriller*.

DAVE DA STEWART, VIA FACEBOOK

I HAVEN'T USED my iPod since your last *Rue Morgue* podcast; I have no use for it anymore. I saw somewhere you did a live show (that I missed because I was working). Is that show available on iTunes or someplace to download? I miss your show and it was the first and only podcast I really listened to.

NICHOLAS SANCHEZ, ADDRESS WITHHELD

IT IS WITH A HEAVY HEART I type this as I am still suffering from the intense emotional pain brought on by the passing of the podcast. I truly had a blast listening and learned quite a bit and found a home in the *Rue Morgue* Podcast. It got me through some shitty days and introduced me to some new music, film and art. Angst for the memories, I guess. I'll keep my eyes peeled for all your new ventures.

ROBERT "THE DEATH WHEELER" WHITAKER, ADDRESS WITHHELD

[*Check out the RM Podcast FB page for links to back episodes* – Ed]

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EXPIRING MINDS...

ON RUE MORGUE'S FACEBOOK PAGE



Tell us about the most frightening ghost story you've ever read

A true story by Jack and Janet Smurl called *The Haunted*. They lived in a terribly haunted duplex in Pennsylvania. The Warrens did that case. The book scared the shit out of me, and I'm a paranormal investigator!

TONY KING

1408, though it isn't a "ghost" story – the manager of the hotel specifically says it "There are no ghosts in room 1408." The thing in the room was much, much worse... a perfect Lovecraftian twist by Stephen King.

STEPHAN SAWYER

"Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad" still has the power to frighten me, even though I know what's coming. The atmosphere of loneliness and dread really gets under my skin even before the real haunting story kicks in.

DANIEL ADAMS

The poem "The Cremation of Sam McGee" – very chilling indeed. I really felt the cold when reading it. I recommend this one for all to read.

EX SHINOBI

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Dreadlines

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ~ HORROR HAPPENINGS

NEW JOE DANTE HORROR-COMEDY SET FOR SUMMER RELEASE



A new film from Joe Dante is always cause for celebration – particularly one that spotlights a brain-eating, embalming fluid-spewing female zombie. *Burying the Ex*, the director's sixteenth feature, which premiered at the 2014 Venice Film Festival, was recently acquired by Image Entertainment for theatrical release this summer and, like most of his previous horror movies, it dances heartily between playful chills and self-reflexive humour.

Based on a 2008 short film by screenwriter Alan Trezza, *Burying the Ex* centres on Max (*Fright Night's* Anton Yelchin), a movie buff who works in a horror memorabilia store. Max's relationship with his controlling girlfriend, Evelyn (Ashley Greene of *Twilight* fame), is steadily imploding but he can't summon the courage required to dump her. Fate intercedes when she is killed in a freak accident and – after a brief interval of mourning – Max begins a new romance with ice-cream seller Olivia (*True Detective*'s Alexandra Daddario). Unfortunately, Evelyn returns from the grave – due to a demonic totem in Max's store – and is hungrily intent on reuniting with her former beau.

"The situation that our hero finds himself in is one that a lot of people who go to the movies can recognize," says Dante, returning to the zombie subgenre after the emotive, politically-charged Masters of Horror episode *Homecoming* (2005) and the amusing webisode series *Splatter* (2009). "I think that many people out there have been in relationships that they have stayed in for too long – mostly because they did not want to hurt the other person they were involved with. *Burying the Ex* is a romantic comedy that is obviously aimed at a wide audience, but it's also a movie made for fans and those people who used to be called Monster Kids."



As if to reaffirm the film's appeal and lineage, the 68-year-old cineaste reveals that his latest offering features clips from several classic horror films, including *Night of the Living Dead*, which Dante regards as "a movie about ghouls rather than zombies." He also digs up EC Comics as an avowed influence, leading one to assume that – like his contemporaries John Carpenter and George A. Romero – Dante was another rabid collector of *Tales from the Crypt* during his childhood years.

"I would have been – had I been allowed to read them," he chuckles. "It took my college graduate uncle to persuade my parents that *MAD* wasn't a horror comic! As a kid, I once found a damp copy of *Tales from the Crypt* in a field behind my house and squirreled it away to read – only to find it very disturbing. I didn't actually get into EC Comics until the [1970s Russ Cochran] reprints."

Shot on a low budget and a tight twenty-day schedule, at locations all situated within a seven-block radius of Los Angeles, *Burying the Ex* was made under considerable constraints. The experience stirred memories in Dante of his salad days at New World Pictures, toiling for Roger Corman's company on such "foot-in-the-door" movies as *Hollywood Boulevard* and his toothsome sophomore effort *Piranha* (1978).

"Roger once said that he found the greatest freedom in the greatest restraint, and I can relate to that," muses Dante. "Without means you are forced to think outside of the box. I've found that you learn the same lessons from making any movie. You make mistakes that you try not to make again and you learn about a lot of them in the editing room. But there are always new mistakes to be made – no matter how many pictures you've done."



Anton Yelchin shooting ***Burying the Ex*** *and (above) Ashley Greene as the undead Evelyn*

MICHAEL DOYLE

DOCUMENTARY GOES BEHIND THE SCENES OF *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*

Given that it basically birthed the found footage genre, it makes sense that *The Blair Witch Project* would beget its own found footage documentary. Named after *Blair Witch's* working title, *The Woods Movie* is an 83-minute making-of film composed entirely of footage shot by the cast and crew of the 1999 release. Premiering at the Film4 FrightFest in Glasgow, Scotland this past February, the doc is the brainchild of Russ Gomm, 34, a British filmmaker who went from *Blair Witch* super fan to one of the privileged few to ever see the approximately 25 hours of raw footage shot over the course of eight days in 1997.

"As a personal thing, I think I'm a great person to be putting this documentary together because not only am I a filmmaker but I am a huge *Blair Witch* fan as well," Gomm says. "So I feel I can give other fans exactly what they want without them sitting through these twenty-plus hours, although I'm sure most of them would relish the chance to do so."

Around 2005, Gomm started corresponding with Blair Witch co-director Edwardo Sánchez on MySpace. That led to a friendship and, later, a working relationship that saw him contribute to Sánchez's 2011 movie *Lovely Molly* and shoot an episode of his online series *Para Abnormal*.

While Gomm was staying at Sánchez's house in Maryland for the latter project, his host shared something special with him: twenty discs containing the raw *Blair Witch* behind-the-scenes footage.

"I couldn't believe it," Gomm says. "I sat and watched the whole thing. And he couldn't believe I'd sat and watched it, because to him it was, like, 'Why would you do that?' But as a fan it was like a dream come true."

Gomm pitched Sanchez on a *Blair Witch* documentary in October 2013. Sanchez and *Blair Witch* producer Gregg Hale got the footage over to Gomm, now back in England, in early 2014. It would take him about a year, in between other projects, to edit those 25 hours into *The Woods Movie*.

"Obviously you find out the story of how it happened, the casting and finding locations," Gomm explains. "There's footage of production meetings where they're deciding whether they're going to shoot on 16mm or on video. Everything that you ever imagined wanting to know about it is told."



The documentary, which ends with the film's January 1999 premiere at the Sundance Film Festival (where Artisan Entertainment would acquire it for US $1-million), also features plenty of footage shot by *Blair Witch* stars Joshua Leonard, Heather Donahue and Michael C. Williams.

"People I have shown it to really felt like watching the middle section of the film is like watching an alternate *Blair Witch*," says Gomm. "Obviously Mike, Josh and Heather have the camera and are going off experimenting and stuff, and a lot of that footage has made it into the [documentary]."

Gomm adds that working on *The Woods Movie* made him appreciate the film's originality even more, both as a found footage film and as a scary movie.

"It's such a hard hitting thing, and I don't think people understood why it scared them so much when they watched it," he says. "It's heavily imitated. There are a lot of good found footage movies, but there are a lot of bad ones. People don't seem to do it in the way that is convincing, but *Blair Witch* had that spark. You know, because of the characters, that Heather was never going to put that camera down, no matter what. And it's basically a character study, whereas a lot of the other [feature characters who] just try to find a way that they can shoot continuously with one camera and make an easy found footage flick."



Behind the scenes of ***The Blair Witch Project*** *including making the iconic stickman props*

Gomm, who as of this writing has no definite release plans for *The Woods Movie*, adds, "The terror of it is really in watching these characters go to pieces."

Visit woodsmovie.com for updates.

SEAN PLUMMER



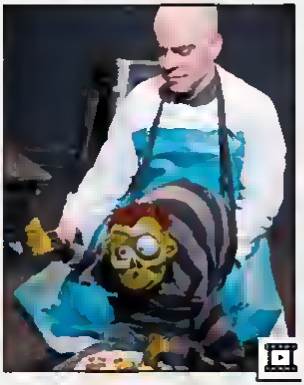
KINDER GOTHIC PUPPET THEATRE MASHES POE AND POOH

What do you get when you stitch together Winnie-the-Pooh and Edgar Allan Poe, then throw in some creepy puppets and parlour magic? You get *House at Poe Corner*.

Set to debut in Toronto this October, the 'ghoulish, kinder-Gothic theatrical' from Eldritch Theatre is a macabre mash up of A.A. Milne and Poe. Milne's most famous characters – Pooh Bear, Piglet and Eeyore among them – are reimagined as the long-forgotten playthings of the long-dead Mr. Usher, a simulacrum of Christopher Robin. Co-writer Eric Woolfe (*Madhouse Variations*, *Frankenstein's Boy*) designed the puppets and co-stars with Michael Petersen (TV's *Fraggle Rock*), they play narrators Edgar and Allan.

House at Poe Corner started with Woolfe and playwright Michael O'Brien (*Mad Boy Chronicle*) commenting on a mutual friend's Facebook page about how boring they found *The Raven*, the 2012 movie that stars John Cusack as Poe.

"We both have similar sensibilities," says Woolfe. "Things don't have to be serious to be good; horror can be fun. When I was a teenager in the '80s, horror movies were fun, and I think that's something that the current crop largely overlooks. We were both happy to take that to a ridiculous place but still have moments that are effectively scary and touching, and have it performed by grotesque little stuffed animals."



Those stuffed animals – who include Poe Bear (not Pooh Bear), Cutlet (not Piglet) and Gloomhoof (not Eeyore) – will be familiar to fans of Milne's world.

"Because the Milne world is still under copyright, the Milne influences are all twisted through the lens of satire," explains Woolfe. "I guess our way into it was wondering what [it would be like] if Edgar Allan Poe wrote children's stories."

To that end Woolfe (pictured above) and O'Brien mine a number of Poe's classic stories – including "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Masque of the Red Death" – to explore the complex friendship between Poe Bear and Cutlet.

"The through-line is kind of their torturous, abusive relationship," Woolfe says, "but this sounds so heavy. It's stuffed animals covered in blood! The theme rose out of that relationship – that life is a futile nightmare of madness, but at least we have each other."

Also being workshopped by Eldritch Theatre for a 2016 debut, la *The Harrowing of Klondike McReedy*, a retelling of the Faust legend with Lovecraftian overtones, set during the Klondike gold rush.

"At the end there needs to be a giant thing with tentacles and white fur and antlers, and a giant vagina mouth with fangs," promises Woolfe with a laugh.

For updated info on the shows, visit eldritch-theatre.ca.

SEAN PLUMMER

ENTRAILS

❯ *American Horror Story* actor Ben Woolf died at age 34 on February 23. The actor, who was born with pituitary dwarfism, succumbed to a head injury after being struck by a side mirror of a car in Los Angeles. He featured in the most recent season of *American Horror Story: Freak Show* as Meep, and in the first season of the show as the bloodthirsty creature Infantata. Woolf also appeared in the indie films *Murder House* and *Haunting Charles Manson*, and worked as a stunt extra in *Dexter*.



❯ As of press time, the San Diego house used in the movie *Paranormal Activity* is on the market. Listed at $749,000, it includes 4 bedrooms, 2.5 bathrooms, a patio and pool. "It's a great neighborhood, I think someone will buy this house quickly," neighbour Manna Irvine told news reporters.

❯ *The Descent* director Neil Marshall has started a new TV and film production company with his agent, Marc Helwig. The duo's new company, Applebox Entertainment, has signed a two year contract with Legendary TV that will focus on genre projects. No specific titles have been announced, but the content, according to deadline.com, will entail "scripted dramas with focus on elevated genre fare and projects with worldwide appeal."

❯ After making the thriller *The Guest*, Adam Wingard is returning to straight-up horror with his next feature, *The Woods*. The *You're Next* director is teaming up with his writing partner Simon Barrett to write a movie about a group of college kids on a camping trip. Wingard hopes to cast unknowns for the feature, which is scheduled to shoot this spring.

❯ News on the remake of the gruesome French film *Martyrs* has been sparse since it was originally announced but it was recently revealed that the movie has already been shot. Brothers Kevin and Michael Goetz (*Scenic Route*) directed the feature with Blumhouse producing. *True Blood*'s Bailey Noble and *Pretty Little Liar*'s Troian Bellisario are starring. No release date has been confirmed.

❯ Stephen King's 1977 *Salem's Lot* spin off short story "One for the Road" is headed to the big screen. Maine-based production companies Bonfire Films and Dark Farm Films will be producing the movie in Falmouth, Windham and Cumberland, the Maine towns that make up the fictional area of Jerusalem's Lot. The vampire story follows two men attempting to rescue the family of a motorist whose vehicle is stranded in a blizzard. Corey Norman (*The Hanover House*) has been announced as the director.

CHARLOTTE STEAR

MONSTRO BIZARRO

Special FX artist William "Bill" Munna has published a book dedicated to the controversial Patterson-Gimlin Bigfoot film. Titled *When Roger Met Patty: 1 Minute of Film, 47 Years of Controversy*, it's an in-depth analysis of the footage, which he believes depicts a real animal.



Munna, whose creature credits include *Return of the Living Dead*, *Swamp Thing* and *The Boogens*, first became fascinated with Bigfoot when he was hired to create realistic replications of relic primates for museum displays. This led to an interest in the famous footage, and he meticulously applied his creature-craft and costume design expertise in an effort to either prove or debunk it. After seven years of research, Munna offers his detailed findings, ruling in favour of Bigfoot.

LYLE BLACKBURN

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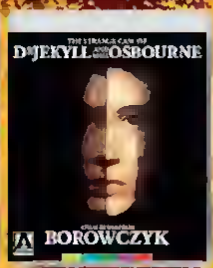
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Meiko Kaji (*Lady Snowblood*) stars in the horror-yakuza hybrid, *Blind Woman's Curse*. Legendary Lee Van Cleef (*The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*) draws his pistols for a *Day of Anger*. Jo (*Branded to Kill*) Shishido's hardboiled yakuza has a *Massacre Gun*, whilst Udo Kier stars in a gory retelling of the classic tale *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne* and Mario Bava's (*Black Sabbath*) precursor to the slasher, *Blood and Black Lace* is unleashed in classic and limited edition SteelBook™ packaging.

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

CASE NO. 154

In 2012, Mao Sugiyama, an "asexual" man from Tokyo, had his penis, testicles and scrotum surgically removed. He then separated the meat into five servings garnished with button mushrooms and Italian parsley, and served each one at a cost of $250.

Ithyphallophobia is a morbid fear of seeing, thinking about or having an erect penis.

Christopher Lee utters exactly thirteen lines throughout Hammer's *Horror of Dracula* (1958).

In 1567, Hans Steininger, an Austrian man said to have the longest beard in the world, died after he tripped over his facial hair while trying to escape a fire. He normally kept the 1.4 metre-long beard in a leather pouch.

Gremlins was originally meant to be a much darker movie and included a scene where Billy's mom's head rolls down the stairs after she's killed.

Several people danced themselves to death during the month-long Dance Fever of 1518 in Strasbourg, France, during which hundreds of people danced for about a month for no clear reason.

Although he would play similar vampires in other films since *Dracula* (1931), *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948) is the second, and last, time that Bela Lugosi would play Dracula in a feature film.

Adolf Frederick, former King of Sweden, is known as "the king who ate himself to death" after he died of digestion problems following a meal of lobster, caviar, sauerkraut, smoked herring and champagne, topped off with fourteen servings of dessert.

Michael Vasey, professor of psychology at Ohio State University, found that people afraid of spiders tend to literally perceive them as bigger than they really are.

In 2012, Erica Marshall, a 26-year-old British veterinarian in Florida, died when the horse she was treating in a hyperbaric chamber kicked the wall, releasing a spark from its horseshoes and triggering an explosion.

Srdjan Spasojevic's *A Serbian Film* (2010) holds a record of having nineteen minutes of footage cut out of it in the United States in order to achieve an NC-17 rating.

Paul G. Thomas, the owner of a wool mill, fell into one of his machines in 1957 and died after being wrapped in 600 yards of wool.

During the filming of 2004's *The Passion of the Christ*, Jim Caviezel – who played Jesus – was struck by lightning.

COMPILED BY BENOIT BLACK AND JAMES JESUS MAGGOT
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT? SEND IT TO: INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM



BODY HORROR

INSIDE

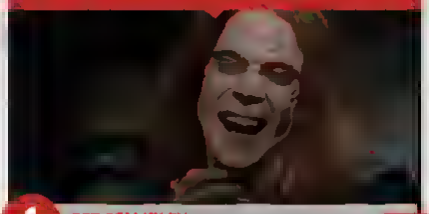
ARTIST: Anthony Jenkins (instagram.com/requiemtattoo)

"I think what I really like about this piece is that it's off the beaten path [in terms of movie-inspired tattoos]. There's more emotion in the reference material, which hopefully translates into a creepier tattoo for the viewer. It was done in one sitting that took about seven hours."

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CREEPY CRIPPLED KIDS



1. **PET SEMATARY** — ONE TWISTED SISTER
2. **FRAGILE** — CHARLOTTE'S BROKEN BODY VENGEANCE
3. **SILENT HILL** — ALESSA IN BED WITH BARBED WIRE
4. **THE BROOD** — MALFORMED MALEVOLENT MUTANTS
5. **THE ORPHANAGE** — HAUNTED BY MASKED TOMÁS
6. **THE CHANGELING** — JOSEPH AND HIS WICKED WHEELCHAIR



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RITUALS (1977)

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Necronomicomics

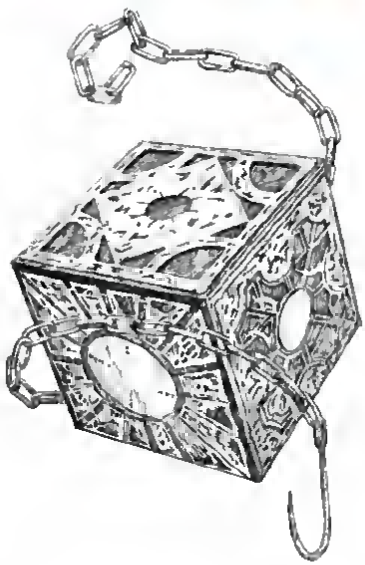
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1



2



3



4



CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

BLACULA SCALE RESIN BUST

(GEOmetric Designs, Inc., 2001; Suntower Studios, 2003)



This highly-detailed resin bust of cursed prince Mamuwalde, from 1972's *Blacula* and its 1973 sequel *Scream, Blacula, Scream* – stands approximately 7" tall and features a fantastic likeness of star William Marshall in his vampiric state. The kit – which requires assembly and painting – includes a base and titular nameplate. Initially released in 2001 by GEOmetric Designs, Inc., it was reissued in 2003 by Suntower Studios. Original versions in unbuilt/unpainted condition rarely show up on eBay, but the reissue can still be purchased for $64.99 at monstersinmotion.com.

JAMES BURRELL

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ON THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF *THE CHANGELING*, DIRECTOR PETER MEDAK TAKES US BACK TO THE TERROR AND TRAGEDY THAT DEFINES ONE OF THE GREATEST GHOST STORIES OF ALL TIME

HAUNTED BY GRIEF

by MICHAEL [illegible]



THE BELIEF IN THE SURVIVAL OF THE HUMAN PERSONALITY AFTER PHYSICAL DEATH HAS ENTHRALLED AND REPELLED MANKIND SINCE THE DAWN OF RECORDED HISTORY. Cultures and societies have documented encounters with phantasmal manifestations through the folkloric tradition of telling ghost stories or by way of paintings, literature, photography and film. A cursory examination of these artefacts (whether factual, fanciful or fraudulent) reveals that for each one that makes our skin crawl, there is another that offers us hope, assuaging the terrors of mortality and the intemperate grief we must all endure when a loved one dies.

Few works illustrate these aspects as powerfully as *The Changeling*, Peter Medak's profoundly frightening and moving study of loss. One of the pre-eminent ghost stories of the cinema, its time-honoured central thesis suggests that the consequences of human tragedy and impunity often echo throughout eternity.

Purportedly based on a true story that occurred at the Henry Treat Rogers mansion in Colorado in the 1960s, *The Changeling* centres on John Russell (George C. Scott), a bereaved composer who accepts a teaching job in Seattle in order to recover from the tragic deaths of his wife and daughter in a winter road accident. With the aid of Claire Norman (Trish Van Devere, Scott's real-life wife), a young woman employed by the Historical Society, Russell leases the imposing Chessman House manor, which has remained largely unoccupied since being donated several years earlier by Joseph Cormichael (Melvyn Douglas), a distinguished U.S. senator.

Soon after moving in, Russell is disturbed by a variety of strange phenomena: faucets turn themselves on and a violent drumming sound echoes throughout the residence with no apparent source. After witnessing the apparition of a child drowning in his bathtub, Russell enlists Claire's assistance in investigating the history of the property.

Together they learn that a young girl named Cora was killed outside Chessman House some 70 years prior, after being struck by a coal cart. Russell later uncovers a sealed room containing a child's wheelchair – as well as a music box that plays a haunting lullaby which he himself has been unwittingly compelled to compose. Shortly thereafter, a medium is summoned to the house and, after a séance is conducted, Russell realizes that Cora is not the wilful spirit that has been reaching out to him. Listening to a recording of the event, he hears the weak voice of a sickly boy relating how he was murdered by his father in the attic room. Using these clues, Russell and Claire discover the remains of a child, which attracts the attention of powerful forces in this world as well as the next.

Released in March of 1980, *The Changeling* arrived nine years after the commercial failure of Medak's ambitious satirical dramedy *The Ruling Class*. Whereas most Canadian horror films of the era – namely *Prom Night*, *Terror Train*, *My Bloody Valentine*, *Happy Birthday to Me* and *Visiting Hours* – brandished the accoutrements of the slasher precept, *The Changeling* aspired to be, in the words of its Hungarian-born director, "something more old-fashioned." Redolent of the shuddersome dread fostered by such precursors as *The Uninvited* (1944) and *The Haunting* (1963), this refined chiller betrays Medak's antipathy to the explicit violence and overcooked special effects found in most genre product of the time. Treading the precarious line between archaic restraint and contemporary visceral shocks, it boasts an evocative score and meticulously honed atmosphere of unease – interspersed with several finely-crafted scares that rank amongst the horror genre's most heart-stopping.



Digging Up The Past: *John Russell (George C. Scott) asks caretaker Mr. Tuttle (C.M. Grimpel) about the strange noises in Chessman House, and (top) John confronts Senator Cormichael.*



The winner of eight Genie Awards (including the prize for best film and acting nods for Scott and Van Devere), *The Changeling* has become a classic also because of its influence on subsequent movies, including Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (and its 2002 Hollywood remake), *What Lies Beneath* and *The Others*. The unnerving seance scene has directly inspired a similar sequence in *Insidious* and the celebrated "bouncing ball" scare has been regurgitated in the likes of Takahisa Zeze's adolescent ghost story *Kokkuri*, as well as in *The Awakening*, *Paranormal Activity 4* and *The Conjuring*. *The Changeling* has even been referenced in the *Silent Hill 3* video game when a child's wheelchair makes an appearance.

With the 35th anniversary of his melancholic masterwork upon us, *Rue Morgue* invited Medak (now 77 but still directing TV shows such as *Breaking Bad* and *Hannibal*) to embrace the spirit of celebration and share his memories of Chessman House.



IS IT TRUE THAT YOU WERE NEITHER THE FIRST NOR INDEED THE SECOND CHOICE TO DIRECT *THE CHANGELING*?

Yes, that's true. Tony Richardson [*Tom Jones*] was attached to the film very early on and then Donald Cammell [*Demon Seed*] became involved just before I did. Donald, who was a friend of mine, got into a disagreement with the producers – Joel Michaels and Garth Drabinsky – and I'm not quite sure what it was all about. I think he may have wanted to shoot the film in black and white, I really don't know, but they got rid of him. *The Changeling* then came to me through a friend of a friend who knew Joel and Garth. So my involvement began – as it sometimes does – with a phone call. I was still living in England at the time and as soon as I read the script I was interested. We all agreed to meet up in New York and then later went on to Vancouver to look at the locations. But when I found out that Donald was the director hired before me, I really didn't want to do the film. I actually called Donald up and we spoke about it, but he said, "No, Peter, don't be silly. You can make a really great movie out of this."

WHAT INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE SCREENPLAY?

Oh, it terrified me! It really did. I can distinctly remember reading the script upstairs in my house in London as my wife and children were downstairs. I was so petrified I couldn't bring myself to leave the room and join them! [Laughs] The script just grabbed me immediately, as I love very clean and intelligent ghost stories that don't rely heavily on special effects. When you read something that scares you like that, you quickly realize you must do it because these kinds of scripts are rare. In fact, I've been searching all these years for another ghost story to direct that has that same quality. Many years before doing *The Changeling*, I was desperate for the job of second assistant director to Robert Wise on *The Haunting*. I'd read the script for *The Haunting* and, quite honestly, I couldn't sleep afterwards. I was so terrified because the story treated everything very seriously. I thought the script for *The Changeling* had that same realistic element to it. I was also fascinated to hear that it was based on a true story and was apparently conceived from an old newspaper article.

> "MY IDEA WAS TO MAKE *THE CHANGELING* INTO A KIND OF HITCHCOCKIAN HAUNTED HOUSE MOVIE."
> – PETER MEDAK

DID YOU MAKE ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO THE SCRIPT?

I changed a lot of it because there were some strange things in the story that I didn't understand. For example, the script had implosions rather than explosions, that kind of thing, and I was insistent that everything be totally realistic. When you are making a ghost story – whatever your approach or beliefs are – you have to make it all seem believable. My objective right from the beginning was to get rid of all the special effects and attempt to tell our story through the writing, acting and camera-work. I loved Hitchcock and my idea was to make *The Changeling* into a kind of Hitchcockian haunted house movie.

GEORGE C. SCOTT WAS A PRODIGIOUS ACTOR BUT CULTIVATED A REPUTATION FOR BEING DIFFICULT AND INTIMIDATING. HOW DID HE BEHAVE DURING SHOOTING?

George was actually attached to *The Changeling* before I was and had director approval. I remember flying with Joel to Connecticut, where George was living at the time, to meet him. We sat in his dining room and went through the whole script and I explained to George everything I planned to do. He just listened, staring at me from across this long table, like, "Who is this insane guy?" [Laughs] But once George realized he wasn't dealing with a complete idiot, he allowed me to do anything I wanted with him. On the very first day of shooting – before we'd even done the first shot of the movie – we were doing the scene near the beginning of George walking on the streets by Lincoln Centre [in New York]. It was pouring rain and I went up to him and said, "Good luck, George," and gave him a big hug. He just looked at me like I'd gone mad! In fact, he used to call me, "My Crazy Hungarian." It took

me about three days to conquer him, but after that he started getting intrigued with everything. He asked questions about what lenses I was using and even started coming to the dailies. I had the most heavenly time working with him.

AM I RIGHT IN BELIEVING THAT SCOTT COULD ACTUALLY PLAY THE PIANO?

George could play slightly but he rehearsed the music his character was playing. We had a coach with us and, in fact, there was much more piano playing in the original cut of *The Changeling*. There was a very difficult piece that George played at the beginning of the movie – my lost deleted beginning. The film was originally going to open with a wonderful shot of George playing the piano in a deserted auditorium. The camera started on his fingers and then went up to his face and then moved into the piano and went into the strings and came down into the black; it went all around in a circle and came back out again to his fingers and finally back to his face. During that long circular movement I was going to cut in the sequence that now opens the movie, which shows the tragic deaths of his family in the road accident. Unfortunately, I was told to remove that shot because it was "too European." Apparently, American audiences prefer to get into the story much more quickly. But that scene was very powerful – both emotionally and technically – because it showed George playing a wonderful piece and you were totally convinced that he was a great pianist.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EFFORTS TO LOCATE WHAT WOULD EVENTUALLY BECOME CHESSMAN HOUSE

Originally, Donald had an entirely different and radical concept for *The Changeling*. He wanted to make the movie in a house that did not look haunted. When I took over as director, the first thing I said to Joel and Garth was, "I have to see the house." We then drove up there, and before I'd even climbed out of the car, I immediately saw that it was the wrong house. I didn't want to get into an argument about it as I'd only just met my producers, so I calmly walked through the place and inspected everything. We then went up into the attic room, which was an important room in the story, and it was hardly bigger than the width of four desks. That's when I finally told them it would be impossible for me to make the film there.

WHAT WAS THEIR RESPONSE?

Joel simply said, "Well, this is all we've got." We then arranged a meeting for the late afternoon and I said, "I'm afraid I can't shoot this movie unless you are prepared to build the entire house inside and out. If not, I won't do it." Garth said, "Look, we've got six million Canadian dollars and George is getting a million of that. We can't afford to build a house because it will cost another million dollars." I said, "Of course, I understand.



Malevolent Mansion: *Claire Norman (Trish Van Devere) is trapped, a supernatural fire breaks out, and (opposite) Scott in front of* ***The Changeling****'s iconic Chessman House.*



Cold Case: John and Claire investigate the death of Joseph Carmichael, and (top) Senator Carmichael (Melvyn Douglas) shows a medal connected to the child's death.

It was great to meet you guys and good luck." So we all went to bed. I was going to head back to London the next day when, in the middle of the night, I suddenly heard this rustling noise. I looked towards the door and saw this envelope being pushed inside my room. It was a note from Joel and Garth saying, "We've thought about it and we've decided that we need you. We are going to get the money to build the set. We'll start shooting in New York to give us the time we need to build it" – which turned out to be at least five weeks. Then my [production] designer, Trevor Williams, constructed this incredible set that literally went up three stories – plus it had another floor, which was the attic floor, that was a separate set in the studio. It was truly astounding. For the exterior of the house, we built an enormous façade which also went up four stories. It was wonderfully spooky-looking and gothic and it had to be, because the house was crucial to the film's success.

THE MANSION SEEMS RATHER LARGE FOR ONE PERSON TO BE RENTING. DON'T YOU THINK?

Yes, but the house was meant to be a historical building that nobody wanted. One of the criticisms of *The Changeling* at the time [of its release] was that nobody would live alone in such a large-sized house. But I really do believe that if a big house like that became available somebody would have eventually moved into it. I certainly would have. I wanted the house set to be big so I could do the kinds of shots that I wanted to do. I had to be able to track the camera from one room into the next and also move up two or three flights of stairs without a cut. I like moving the camera very much, but in an unobtrusive way. I felt it was important to keep the camera mobile to suggest the presence of the ghost and, obviously, the camera is what you use to tell the story. That doesn't mean I didn't use a static shot in the film. There are several static high-shots of George that suggest someone – or something – is looking at him and this was also meant to be the ghost's point-of-view. In theory, the ghost is always watching George and both of those techniques were intended to give that impression right from the moment he first enters the house.

IS IT TRUE THAT YOU SPENT FOUR MONTHS WORKING ON THE SOUND DESIGN ALONE?

I don't think it was quite four months, but it was a considerable amount of time. I'm still not happy with the banging noise which echoes through the house – the banging of the little boy's fists on the bath as he is being drowned. I could never get that sound quite right and even when we were mixing the movie I was running around in the basement of the mixing studio in Toronto listening to pipes, trying to find the right noise. It took a couple of weeks, but I kept searching for it and was driving everybody crazy. The bangs, the creaks, the wind, the ghost's voice – every sound was important in creating the right atmosphere. In fact, one of my favourite scenes in the movie is when you see George sitting alone in the dark, smoking a cigarette and listening to the tape recording of the séance. He discovers the voice of the ghost whispering on the tape and I thought that was just wonderfully scary. George's very subtle performance also makes that scene work beautifully.

WAS THE SÉANCE SEQUENCE TRICKY TO STAGE?

No, because I'm very tuned into things like that. Unfortunately, there were too many deaths in my family very early on in my life and I actually had dreams of my brother dying at fourteen. Inevitably, I was often attracted to books about spiritualism and I remember that every time I picked up some volume in my father's library I had this peculiar, petrified feeling. I always find myself strangely drawn towards the unknown and so I loved shooting the séance sequence. I particularly like the high shots as the séance begins and we see the empty attic. Then the door slowly creeps open and the camera moves onto the staircase, suggesting that the ghost is once again prowling about. I love playing with that kind of stuff – scaring people in a graceful way – because half of me believes in ghosts and the , the. , oops! [Pause] I'm sorry, but the light has suddenly come on in my room.

UH-OH. LOOK OUT! THEY'RE NEE-ERE!

I know, isn't it wonderful? You just never know! [Laughs] Where was I? Yes, most critics thought that *The Changeling* was great, but some reviews said that if a person actually lived in a haunted house like that they would have run away. But if you remember that this man's wife and daughter have just been wiped out, you'd realize that he's vulnerable and perhaps his grief makes him receptive to this type of haunting. He may think that it's his family members who are roaming the place, and so at first it could even be a source of comfort to him. In reality, if you were to get over the initial fear of something lurking about upstairs, you really wouldn't be able to stop yourself from going up there to investigate. I certainly would, because I want to know what is on the other side – if such a place exists. It's always wonderful to dabble with that kind of uncertainty.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE FILM'S MOST ICONIC SCARE. THE CHILD'S BALL BOUNCING DOWN THE STAIRS SHORTLY AFTER RUSSELL HAS DROPPED IT INTO A RIVER SEVERAL MILES AWAY?

That moment may now be iconic but we actually experienced some problems getting that shot. George's reaction to suddenly seeing the ball again was fabulous, but the special effects

ONE OF *THE CHANGELING*'S BIGGEST FANS, DIRECTOR **MICK GARRIS** EXPLAINS WHY THE MOVIE CONTINUES TO INFLUENCE FILMMAKERS

KINDRED SPIRITS



NONE OF THESE MOVIES ARE TOO BIG, BECAUSE TO REPRODUCE IN LIFETIMES OUT OF THE HUMAN IMAGINATION. *The Changeling* is no exception and counts among its famous fans Guillermo del Toro, James Wan, Ti West, Eduardo Sanchez, Bernard Rose, Greg Nicotero, Johnny Depp and, last but by no means least, Martin Scorsese. The *Goodfellas* director even included Peter Medak's stately ghost story in his 2009 list of the eleven scariest horror films of all time, praising the manner in which it is resolutely "filled with sadness and dread."

Another admirer of *The Changeling* – who's uniquely placed to offer his own appreciation of it – is Mick Garris, director of *Sleepwalkers* and *The Stand*, and the creator of *Masters of Horror*. The Santa Monica native first became a fan of Medak's work after catching a screening of his 1972 comedy of cruelty *The Ruling Class*, which starred Peter O'Toole as the Earl of Gurney – a madman who believes he is Jesus Christ and later Jack the Ripper. But it was Medak's sixth feature that really gripped Garris.

"I first saw *The Changeling* in North Hollywood during its initial theatrical release and was blown away by it," he recalls. "I've always loved the original *The Haunting*, as well as *The Legend of Hell House*, and Peter's movie was very much part of that triptych. The beautiful use of wide lenses and the excruciatingly painful emotions portrayed in the film were quite amazing in a genre production – especially of that era. At a time when horror films were being made primarily because of the Canadian tax incentive laws, *The Changeling* was a true high in films shot in that country – or anywhere else for that matter."

Years later, Garris invited Medak – whose other credits include *The Krays*, *Romeo is Bleeding* and *Species II* – to join the roster of directors he was assembling for the second and final season of *Masters of Horror*. The two men forged a friendship after Medak (who has also worked as a first assistant director to the likes of Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean, Carol Reed and Terence Fisher) agreed to helm an adaptation of *The Washingtonians*, Bentley Little's deliciously droll tale of cannibalism and revisionist politics. However, where *The Washingtonians* places the accent firmly on satire and stomach churning gore, *The Changeling* is characterized by its trenchant emotionalism – a quality Garris feels has allowed it to endure.

"The sadness, pain and humanity of *The Changeling* are pretty much unmatched in modern cinematic ghost stories," he argues. "All of the horrific elements work incredibly well because they take their time. The old wheelchair in particular is quite haunting, and so many of the creeping camera moves unsettle us. But for me, it is George C. Scott's tortured central performance – filled with the pain of loss – that is most memorable about *The Changeling*. Rarely has a genre film been so steeped in human emotion and depth of character. It's such a raw and searing performance."

Despite the "bouncing ball" scene often being cited as the movie's most vigorous scare, Garris believes Medak's deft use of camera movement, editing, sound and silence to construct moments of icy fear combine most effectively during the eerie seance sequence (pictured above).

"[T]he séance scene remains as implanted in my heart as it is in my head," he admits. "It hurts, and it expands as Scott's hopes and doubts take shape in what is a hauntingly lit and photographed sequence. When I did *Valerie on the Stairs* [Garris' 2006 *Masters of Horror* entry set in a demon haunted, shadow-drenched hostel for unpublished authors], we tried to make the most of stillness, quiet, low-angle moving wide lenses and anticipation. We tried to use a bit of that influence, which really started with *The Haunting*."



As Medak prepares his next film, *Fallen Moon*, a thriller about a Japanese detective in New York who – like John Russell in *The Changeling* – must contend with the violent death of his young daughter, Garris exclusively reveals that he and the Budapest-born Brit have also been developing a new project together, though he can't unveil any details yet.

"Peter is a passionate man, and that extends to his approach as a filmmaker," he says. "He is also incredibly cultured and intelligent, but combine those qualities with a wicked sense of humour and a great deal of sweetness. I really hope to work with him again soon."





Spectral Motion: *John finds Joseph's rubber ball at the bottom of the stairs after throwing it in the river, and he's nearly killed by a chandelier that falls from the ceiling as the house burns.*

guys – well, they were more like prop guys – had brought these weighted balls to do the shot of the ball bouncing down the stairs. The ball was meant to stop dead in front of George and we did about three takes and each one was completely screwed-up. I was furious because we'd had meetings about how this was going to work, but it just wasn't happening. Eventually I said, "Give me that fucking ball!" Then, in front of the whole crew, I rushed up the stairs with it, turned around and suddenly thought to myself, "I'm going to look like a complete idiot if this doesn't stop exactly where it's supposed to." I slowly released the ball and it went bouncing down the stairs and stopped dead on the spot in front of George. That's the very take we used in the film and it's fantastic.

SIMILARLY, THERE'S SOMETHING INHERENTLY ABSURD ABOUT THE SIGHT OF AN ANTIQUE WHEELCHAIR PURSUING TRISH VAN DEVERE – AND YET IT'S STILL TERRIFYING!

Some people scream and jump out of their seats at that scene, which is interesting because, in reality, that wheelchair never really worked. It was a specially-built motorized wheelchair that would just go wobbling along and never quite went fast enough. But the magic of shooting and editing allows you to create something that is still scary. The image of the wheelchair physically represents the ghostly boy, and there is something sad and haunting about seeing a child's wheelchair – particularly a disused one. If you went up into the darkened attic of an old house and saw that object you would be scared. It's odd how seeing something like that affects you emotionally.

WHAT DID *THE CHANGELING* DO FOR YOUR CAREER?

It didn't do that much, actually. It was great that people in the business now realized I could direct a scary movie but, unfortunately, *The Changeling* was distributed very badly. It didn't go into the right hands and, if it had, it would have done much better business. It's also been ripped off so many times I couldn't possibly count them all. I mean, there have been movies which have made $100 million at the box-office – like *The Ring* and *The Others* – that have stolen from *The Changeling*.

> "IT TOUCHES ON THE MYSTERIES OF DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE, AND THE OVERWHELMING DESPAIR OF GRIEF."
> – PETER MEDAK

I HAVE NOTICED THAT FILMMAKERS SEEM TO CONTINUALLY BORROW FROM YOUR MOVIE.

Yes, and I imagine that's because it works. Johnny Depp loved the film so much he got in touch with me and said, "*The Changeling* is the greatest ghost story of all time. We really have to meet." So we did, and for about five years we developed a script together called *Inamorata*, which was based on the novel by Joseph Gangemi. Sadly, even with all the power that Johnny has in the business, we couldn't get the movie off the ground. *Inamorata* would have made a lovely companion piece to *The Changeling* and, as I'd done on that film, I minimized some stuff in the story and kept the ghostly elements subtle. It was going to be a $40 million dollar movie as Warner Bros. wanted more shocks – more of everything – and I felt that approach just didn't work. But that project only came about because Johnny adores *The Changeling*.

HAS ANYONE ELSE IN THE INDUSTRY EXPRESSED THEIR ADMIRATION FOR IT?

My friend, Mick Garris, organizes these *Masters of Horror* dinners every three or four months and all the horror directors, like Mick and Tobe Hooper, get together and have the most wonderful time. The first time I went, John Landis approached me and said, "What the fuck are you doing here? You're not a horror director." Quentin Tarantino, who was also there, said, "Are you serious, John? What about *The Changeling*? What are you talking about?" I mean, they almost got into a fist-fight about it! [Laughs]

WHY DO YOU THINK *THE CHANGELING* RETAINS ITS PERSUASIVE POWER TO UNNERVE?

It's probably because there are only a handful of truly great ghost stories in the cinema. *The Haunting* and *The Uninvited* – which I dearly love – are two, then you have *The Innocents* and then maybe *The Changeling*. What makes my movie effective is that it's a psychological ghost story that works on many levels. It touches on the mysteries of death and the afterlife, and the overwhelming despair of grief. Audiences clearly respond to things that are unknown, understated and, again, have some basis in reality. These elements are not always present in supernatural movies. For example, the most frightening moment in *Poltergeist* is not the tree monster coming through the window, but everyday objects moving an inch across the kitchen floor. It's often the smaller moments that work best, because on that level you can really terrify people. *The Changeling* is filled with these small moments and that's the very simple reason why it still remains scary to this day.

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BLAXPLOITATION EXPERT DAVID F. WALKER TAKES US INSIDE THE SUBGENRE'S FIRST HORROR MOVIES, [illegible] AND [illegible]

THE COLOUR OF BLOOD

COLIN McCRACKEN



"I MAY HAVE HAD A CATCHY PUN IN ITS TITLE, BUT *BLACULA* WAS NO LAUGHING MATTER"

Not only did William Crain's 1972 feature combine popular blaxploitation tropes of the time – funky soundtracks, garish clothes, massive sideburns and plenty of action sequences – into a classic horror framework, it used the genre as a springboard for social issues. George A. Romero had ventured into similar territory four years earlier with *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), but *Blacula* was the first successful horror film to star an almost entirely black cast, whilst portraying the white characters as corrupt, inept or simply monstrous.

Blacula tells the tale of Mamuwalde (William Marshall), an African Prince who, in 1780, travels to Transylvania to seek help from Count Dracula in a bid to end the slave trade. The Count attacks him, natch, and curses Mamuwalde to "a wild, gnawing, animal hunger" before sealing him inside a coffin which is opened 200 years later by a pair of hapless interior decorators. What follows is a mixture of the ridiculous and the profound, as Blacula seeks sustenance, revenge ... and a lost love.

"*Blacula* gets into subjects like police brutality and the way law enforcement treats black people in America," explains David Walker, the film historian, author and filmmaker who provided the commentary for the newly-released Scream Factory Blu-ray of the film. "It deals with how a white power structure turns black folks into monsters, and in that regard, it serves as a metaphor for what slavery in America and in Europe did."

Even so, the movie didn't originally have such a social conscience. *Blacula* began as just another cheapie for American International Pictures, a company founded by James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff in the '50s. They catered to the youth market, making drag racing and surf movies, before moving into more experimental fare in the '60s, when they released Roger Corman's legendary cycle of Edgar Allan Poe films, as well as psychedelic masterpiece *The Trip* (1967) and early features from cinematic luminaries including Martin Scorsese (*Boxcar Bertha*). By the early '70s, they were eager to cash in on the blaxploitation craze, which had been sparked by successful movies such as *Shaft* (1971) and *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971).

When Joan Torres and Raymond Koenig's *Blacula* script landed on Ar-

koff's desk, the title alone made it too much to pass up. AIP offered the job to Crain, who was then only in his early twenties and had limited experience.

"Crain was working in television at the time, which is where a lot of the AIP directors came from," explains Walker. "There was always a period during the year when they weren't selling TV shows, and so a lot of these directors would end up making films for Arkoff."

Walker, who extensively researched the production, tracking down Marshall's family members (the actor died in 2003 at the age of 78) and utilizing his own archive of interview footage (his blaxploitation documentary *Macked, Hammered, Shafted and Slaughtered* is available on YouTube), attests that the *Blacula* star was responsible for bringing substance to the film's style. Marshall, a highly trained Shakespearean stage actor, was unhappy with the original version of the script due to his stringent belief that black characters deserved to be treated with dignity onscreen, and not be there for comic relief.

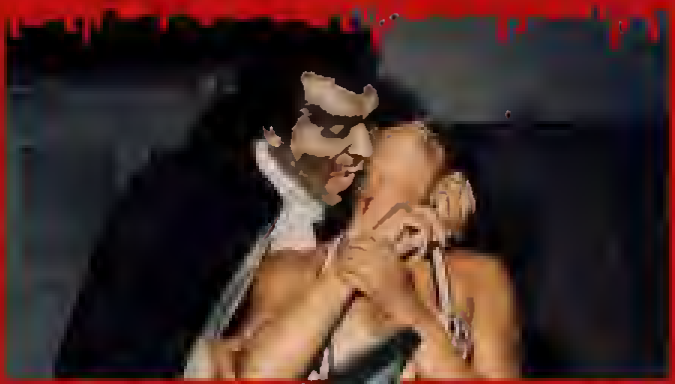
"He saw in the script an opportunity to improve on it and tell a worthwhile story," says Walker. "Arkoff was willing to let the changes be made, particularly to the character that becomes Blacula. In the original script he was a slave in America who is transformed into a vampire, and Marshall just turned the whole thing around. He introduced the slave trade story about how Blacula was originally an African prince. Once you know that and you watch the movie, you can see that there's a tonal difference within the film. There are parts in which someone clearly said, 'Okay, let's do something good here'... When I interviewed [Marshall], he told me that the script he initially got was garbage."

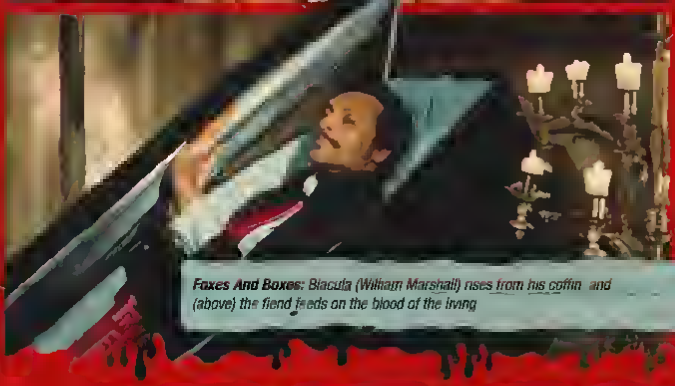
An extremely politically active person, Marshall was an associate and big fan of Paul Robeson, an actor and civil rights activist that was outed as a communist during the McCarthy witch hunts of the '50s.

"Marshall was one of those guys who believed that there was a certain amount of responsibility which actors had," says Walker. "He recognized that these movies were being marketed to a young audience, the Saturday matinee crowd. That was part of what motivated him into making the film and implementing the changes that he did. This was his way of getting a message across to a younger crowd."

Equally important to *Blacula*'s effectiveness, though, is Marshall's commanding screen presence. Like Richard Roundtree's John Shaft in *Shaft* (1971), or Ron O'Neil's Youngblond Priest in *Super Fly* (1972), the movie succeeds on his performance and might have flopped with a different star.

"If it would have been anyone else, it would have been a movie like *Blackenstein*, which is





Foxes And Boxes: *Blacula (William Marshall) rises from his coffin and (above) the fiend feeds on the blood of the living*

populated by 'Who are they?' or 'Where are they now?' actors," says Walker. "It took someone like Marshall to stand up and say 'I want to make changes to this,' to take the film to another level. The most memorable parts of that film, the parts that really work, are all down to him."

Indeed Marshall gives a performance as memorable as any genre icon. With a booming voice, impressive stature and piercing glare, he cuts an imposing figure, selling his character as both a sensitive lovelorn romantic, and a cruel, blood-crazed beast. Like the classic Universal monsters after which he is modelled, Blacula is also a highly sympathetic monster, a character trait that unquestionably helped spark a more positive representation of African-American characters in genre features.



"Up until *Blacula*, every time you saw a black character in a horror film, it was in something like Jack Hill's *Spider Baby*, where it would be a disposable joke of a character," says Walker. "Then *Night of the Living Dead* comes along and that shifts the paradigm, but you never saw entire films built around that shift. There wasn't a ton of these crossover films either, and *Blacula* is head and shoulders over them all."

The movie also contains some genuine scares. Walker, who first saw *Blacula* on TV in the '70s, found himself terrified by two particular sequences: when the cab driver comes back to life in the morgue as a ghoulishly green vampire and attacks one of the workers ("It's shot in slow motion and that scared me really bad," recalls Walker), and when the film's police hero, Dr. Gordon Thomas (Thalmus Rasulala), digs up the grave of Blacula's first victim, only to be attacked by the undead man.

Unfortunately, things went downhill with *Scream, Blacula Scream* (1973), which is also

DA SWEET BLOOD OF JESUS – SPIKE LEE'S REMAKE OF RADICAL '70S VAMPIRE FILM *GANJA & HESS* – BROUGHT STAR ZARAAH ABRAHAMS TO HER KNEES IN THE NAME OF ADDICTION

UNQUENCHABLE THIRST

by DAVE ALEXANDER

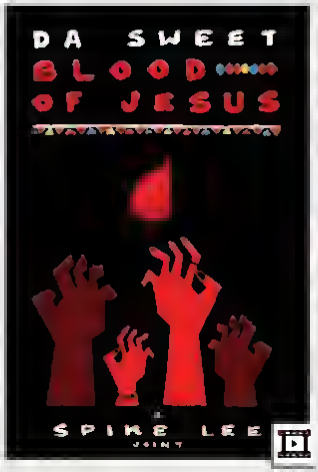


SOME OF THE MOST COMPELLING FILMS ARE THE ONES THAT FIT UNEASILY INTO THEIR GENRES. WHEN BILL GUNN'S *GANJA & HESS* CAME OUT IN 1973, THE SAME YEAR AS *BLACULA*, IT ESCHEWED THE CONVENTIONS OF BOTH THE BLAXPLOITATION MOVIE AND THE VAMPIRE STORY. It didn't play with racial stereotypes, take place in an urban setting or have a typically violent plot. It rejected monster movie stereotypes (no fangs or capes), had no obvious creepy atmosphere and didn't feature lavish scenes of sensual blood drinking.

Instead, it centred around archeologist Dr. Hess Green (*Night of the Living Dead*'s Duane Jones), who lives on a country estate. When Hess' mentally ill assistant (played by Gunn) stabs him with an ancient African ceremonial dagger before committing suicide, the doctor is afflicted with a curse that makes him immortal but blood starved. Soon, Ganja Hightower, the dead man's widow, comes looking for him but falls in love with Hess, who shares his curse with her, leading to his downfall. With stretches of philosophical/religious dialogue, editing choices that mess with the films timeline, and a feverish experimental soundtrack, *Ganja & Hess* is unparalleled.

That also makes it a tough film to remake, yet one with compelling possibilities for updating its metaphors about addiction. Enter Spike Lee, who re-imagined the film thanks to a $1.5 million Kickstarter budget. The recently released *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*, like *Ganja & Hess*, contains metaphors much thicker than water.

"Even though I'd read the script 1000 times, and I'd done all the scenes, once it was pieced together, I was really taken aback, I think there's so much going on," says Zaraah Abrahams, who plays Ganja in Lee's retooling. "I think it looks beautiful, and in terms of how gory it is, it certainly hits the horror genre. But there is a lot more to it than just horror, which I think is really apparent in the film."



As in *Ganja & Hess*, vampirism is the genre trope in which to deliver several metaphors about addiction. A literal need for blood exists alongside lusts for money, power and social status. Hess (Stephen Tyrone Williams) has removed himself from the realities of urban black culture by retreating to his beach house, which is taken care of by a servant, and entertaining his bourgeois friends. Ganja is a woman craving comfort and the finer things in life.

"It wasn't about vampires, it was about addiction," affirms Abrahams. "And I wanted to make sure that I was focusing on that. [Ganja is] addicted to a certain level of success. And I definitely think she's addicted to thriving – making sure she's not being left behind. She's definitely addicted to power and money. And then, towards the end, I think she's quite addicted to Hess."

Lee replicates some scenes from *Ganja & Hess* shot-for-shot, but also updates the story in several significant ways. Aside from a mellower score (sourced from an online contest in which artists could submit music to be included on the soundtrack) and a linear plot, the writer/director adds a sequence in which Hess fears that he has contracted AIDS from feeding on a HIV-positive prostitute. Lee also introduces a lesbian angle that, as Abrahams explains, comments on romantic addiction.

"I know that was really important to Spike that it be a woman [that comes to Ganja from the gravel]," she says. "I think it was important for us to get that across in Ganja's journey, when she says, 'Ganja takes care of Ganja.' If a man arose from the dead it would seem that she hadn't completed her journey. It would have seemed that, again, she was relying on somebody else to carry her through her addiction to money and power. The fact that it was a woman, for me, made her journey very complete."

Da Sweet Blood of Jesus, as the title change indicates, is even more critical of religion as the opiate of the (here, specifically black) masses. Just like parishioners lapping up the metaphorical blood of Christ, Ganja and Hess find themselves on their knees, licking blood off the bathroom floor.

"I think I had an out-of-body experience watching myself do this," recalls Abrahams of tonguing up red syrup while in her underwear. "The blood was gross, but the scene was just so animalistic; I've never been in the position before, never acted like that before. It was an extremely tense day."

NOT ONE TO SHY AWAY FROM TELLING IT LIKE IT IS, BLAXPLOITATION PIONEER AND CINEMATIC VAMPIRE KILLER FRED WILLIAMSON TACKLES OUR QUESTIONS HEAD ON

HITTING HARD WITH THE HAMMER

JONATHAN DOYLE

HORROR FANS BEST KNOW HIM AS FROST, THE CIGAR CHOMPIN', VAMPIRE KILLIN' BIKER in Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino's *From Dusk Till Dawn*, but Fred "The Hammer" Williamson – a former NFL football star-turned actor who appeared in Robert Altman's *M.A.S.H* – is also one of the first stars in the blaxploitation cycle of films in the '70s. After starring in movies such as *Black Caesar* (1973) *Hell Up in Harlem* (1973) and *Boss Nigger* (1975), Williamson (who's also a director, writer and producer), appeared in cult classics *The Inglorious Bastards* (1978) and *1990: The Bronx Warriors*. More recently, he directed, co-wrote and appeared in the indie film *Vegas Vampires* (2007). While in Toronto this past February to accept the Toronto Black Film Festival's inaugural Pioneer Award, we caught up with the imposing legend for a quick chat about his career in genre movies.

You worked with Quentin Tarantino on* From Dusk Till Dawn, *and he's been a vocal supporter of black cinema from the '70s. How do you feel about* Django Unchained *and the whole revival?

Django Unchained is a rip-off of *The Legend of Nigger Charley*. He also did *Inglourious Basterds*, which is a rip-off of my *Inglorious Bastards*. We mentioned it to him and he changed it to "basterd." Obviously, he respects my work. *The New York Post* did a full story on him about how he must like the Hammer's work because he seems to be copying a lot of his films, so I'm not the only one who noticed that.

But he put you in* From Dusk Till Dawn *and I think he was pretty vocal about the* Inglorious Bastards *connection, right?

I don't really know. I never really heard him talk about *Inglorious Bastards*. He put me in *From Dusk Till Dawn* because I was the best for that role. Everybody was giving readings and I went in and gave the reading The Hammer would do and they fell out of their chairs. But to me it was straight. I wasn't being funny, see? And that's what made it work. They wanted somebody to pull it off as funny, but I came in straight as the Hammer and they fell out of their chairs, him and Rodriguez, so I knew right away that I had them.

So what would you say is the film you're most proud of? The film you want to be remembered for.

Well, I can't answer that question because every film that I do, I do only because I want to, because they fit into my three rules: you can't kill me, I have to win my fight, and I always get the girl at the end of the movie, so I don't do anything outside of that realm. Every movie I make satisfies two out of three of those.

How do you feel about the term blaxploitation?

I don't know what it means. They try to fit me into that mould. The white press created that, which eventually became the demise of those films. It's a negative connotation in the States. It's not so negative in Canada, and it's not so negative in Europe because they don't have the same feeling toward blacks that the United States does. It was a demise and it became self-destructive because all of the films were about retribution: "Let's kick whitey's ass. Let's get whitey back." I escaped it because I knew better. I kick white ass, black ass, pink ass, yellow ass.

You're an equal opportunity ass-kicker.

I was an equal opportunity ass-kicker, so I didn't fall into that genre. They kept trying to fit me into there, but it didn't work. That's why I'm the only person left [from that time who is still really active]. Jim Brown's gone, [Richard] Roundtree's gone, Billy Dee Williams is gone. Everybody that was popular during that era is gone.

Do you feel like you get the respect you deserve from the industry?

I don't think I ever will because I'm an innovator. I'm a troublemaker. That's what makes me a pioneer. The guys who start it never get their due.



included on Scream Factory's *Blacula* Blu-ray. Crain was out and Bob Kelljan (director of 1974's revenge fantasy *Rape Squad*) was in. Although it boasts Pam Grier in one of her earliest roles, the charm and depth of the first installment was quickly discarded for a threadbare voodoo plot that saw Mamuwalde reincarnated, creating an army of the undead in a lazy, uninspired production.

"It's like a sequel in every way, shape and form," says Walker, "It does have its moments, but there's not a great film in there. The character of Blacula in the first movie is such a tragic one, but that depth isn't there in the sequel at all."

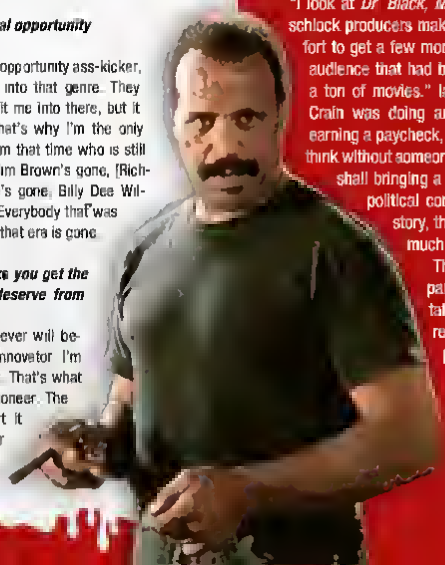
In addition to *Scream, Blacula Scream*, Marshall also appeared in the 1974 *Exorcist* rip-off *Abby*. Again, he used the film as an opportunity to present a positive black character in the context of a horror movie.

"The character that he plays is almost as out of place as the one he plays in *Blacula*," notes Walker. "He's this intelligent, professor who is also an exorcist, or blaxorcist if you will."

Crain, meanwhile, also continued to work in blaxploitation horror with *Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde* (1976).

"I look at *Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde*, and I see schlock producers making a last-ditch effort to get a few more dollars out of an audience that had been slammed with a ton of movies," laments Walker. "If Crain was doing anything other than earning a paycheck, I can't see it. And I think without someone like William Marshall bringing a sense of class and political consciousness to the story, the film doesn't have much to offer."

These films were part of the blaxploitation cycle that reached its height of popularity around '74 or '75, one which spat out the stars it had only recently lauded.



SOUL BLOOD BROTHER

BLACULA (1972) Blu-ray

Starring William Marshall, Vonetta McGee and Thalmus Rasulala
Directed by William Crain
Written by Joan Torres and Raymond Koenig

SCREAM, BLACULA, SCREAM (1973)

Starring William Marshall, Pam Grier and Don Mitchell
Directed by Bob Kelljan
Written by Joan Torres, Raymond Koenig, Maurice Jules
Scream Factory

The first film to push the blaxploitation fad into horror territory, *Blacula*, and its looser, hipper sequel – *Scream, Blacula, Scream* – may look like the AIP marketing department's in-joke, but they're actually surprisingly well-realized, and influential in kicking off a series of other black horror hits.

A high-concept swirl of voodoo, African heritage and blood-sucking fun, Scream Factory's new Blu-ray double feature of the films reveal that *Blacula* is more than just a pop culture curio.

In the first film, hapless L.A. interior designers purchase a musty old coffin and accidentally unleash its fanged inhabitant, the 200-year-old African ruler Prince Mamuwalde (William Marshall), who was originally cursed by ol' Dracula (Charles Macaulay) himself. Mamuwalde/Blacula starts feasting on locals, until he runs into Tina (Vonetta McGee), who he believes is the reincarnation of his former wife. But Lt. Peters (Gordon Pinsent) and police pathologist Dr. Thomas (Thalmus Rasulala) are in close pursuit of him and his growing army of vampire killers.



Released the following year, *Scream, Blacula, Scream* has blaxploitation mainstay Pam Grier join the fun as Lisa, Blacula's latest squeeze. Revived through a voodoo ritual, Mamuwalde runs into her and her boyfriend (Don Mitchell), an African artifact collector with an interest in the occult. Lisa soon realizes that Mamuwalde is the reason all her friends are now avoiding mirrors, and agrees to try to cure him of vampirism using voodoo.

Despite the novelty of their premise, the *Blacula* films are rooted on a rock solid horror foundation, drawing in particular from Universal horror classics such as *The Mummy*, *The Wolf Man* and, of course, *Dracula*. As a result, the movies are relatively chaste, curiously free of some of the sexual undertones that helped define the 1970s vampire film resurgence.

But it's all overshadowed by classically-trained actor William Marshall's fascinating performances. If the film was meant as a joke, Marshall certainly never got the memo, as his commanding tone and undeniable screen presence help pull these quickie AIP fad crossovers to a higher level of funky fright.

Scream Factory's double feature looks fantastic, with eye-popping colours. The extras includes audio commentaries with David F. Walker, a filmmaker and author of *Reflections on Blaxploitation: Actors and Directors Speak* (but no material with *Blacula* director William Crain, unfortunately), a new interview with *Scream, Blacula, Scream* co-star Richard Lawson and trailers.

It's good to know that the "Black Prince of Shadows" finally stalks Blu-ray.

PAUL CORUPE



Back For Blood. *Lisa Fortier (Pam Grier) revives Blacula with voodoo in* ***Scream, Blacula, Scream****, and (top) the vampire faces the police*

"When those films started to lose popularity and make less and less money, many of the people involved were left to die on the vine," says Walker. "Very few actors had careers that flourished after the blaxploitation craze died, and I suspect for someone like William Marshall, whose biggest hit was *Blacula*, it was difficult for him to be taken seriously. You've got to remember, there wasn't a big call for classically trained Shakespearean actors that happened to be African American in the '80s. You look at the best actors to star in blaxploitation movies, the ones that were real actors, and most of them had trouble getting work after the cycle ended."

That said, Marshall did develop a second cult following for his recurring role on *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* (1986 – 1991), in which he donned a crown as the King of Cartoons, arriving at the playhouse with a projector to show an animated short. He even returned to the world of vampires as the narrator of the 1996 TV documentary *Vampires: Thirst for the Truth*, in one of his final film credits.

Ever since *Blacula*, the mixture of black culture and horror film has been an uneasy affair. When it works, it can create thoughtful, original cinema, such as Bill Gunn's *Ganja & Hess* (1973), but when it fails, we get a disposable junk like *Snoop Dogg's Hood of Horror* (2006), which was accused by many critics of reinforcing negative stereotypes of black culture.

Walker asserts that *Blacula* remains popular for deeper cultural reasons that are still important today. "The day we recorded the commentary [for the *Blacula* Blu-ray], it was the day after the courts failed to indict the police officer who shot Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. You get to the end of *Blacula* and the cops kill the unarmed woman [Blacula's love interest, Tina, played by Vonetta McGee], gunned down with her back turned. Blacula then goes crazy and kills all these police officers, and it's a manifestation of a revenge fantasy that black folks had in the late '60s and early '70s. Here we are, 40 years later and it's still relevant. We're still seeing some of the same social plagues."


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MADNESS AND MYTHOS AWAIT AT THE MERRYLIN CRYPTID MUSEUM, ALEX CF'S ART PROJECT OF LOVECRAFTIAN OBJECTS AND OTHER ARCANE CURIOSITIES

AN EXHIBITION OF DARK IMAGINATION

COLIN McCRACKEN



WHEN YOU'VE SEEN ALL THE MOVIES AND READ ALL THE BOOKS, WHERE DO YOU GO TO SATISFY THAT INSATIABLE DESIRE TO DELVE DEEPER INTO THE WORLD OF HORROR LORE? Simple: you create your own. That is exactly what UK-based artist, writer and band frontman Alex CF has done for over a decade. His varied and colourful career has seen him perform with several post-hardcore bands, including scene favourites Fall of Efrafa, a group whose lyrical objective was to explore the socio-political undertones present in Richard Adams' book *Watership Down* (if that sounds a bit highbrow, then it's worth noting that they were heavy as hell.) Additionally, he creates stunning illustrative work and has become known for pushing boundaries within the world of genre-themed sculpture and performance art.

A somewhat elusive and mysterious figure, CF's most recent project, the Merrylin Cryptid Museum, is an expansive and spectacular array of exhibits and artefacts in the realm of Cryptozoology – the scientific study of creatures which have not yet been proven to exist. Here, seekers will find a detailed categorization and analysis of the beings of legend, magick and nightmare. Cryptozoology is a hybrid of fantasy, literature, horror and taxidermy, and CF is the best in the business. To peruse his dark specimens is a breathtaking and unforgettable experience, one which showcases the obsessive and intricate drive of an artist to create a detailed, original and challenging mythology.

Ornate and delicate, these exhibits contain what are purported to be the only existing evidence of an array of mythical beings. Faeries, Vampyr, Wyverns and Demons are merely the tip of the iceberg; CF's work also crosses over into the literary worlds of Lovecraft, Stoker and Poe. Real world horrors, such as Jack the Ripper and Rasputin the Mad Monk are also touched upon, with chilling cabinets and bell-jars purporting to contain body parts, diaries and other ghoulish paraphernalia. Vampire hunting kits, Cheshire Cats and even Nosferatu himself all have their place in this macabre collection.

Rue Morgue was granted a rare audience with CF and, at his request, the interview was given entirely in character and conducted as if fictional explorer, Thomas Theodore Merrylin – to whom the collection is claimed to belong originally – was a real person of history.

"I can only assume from my experiences as curator, that Merrylin himself planned my involvement," notes CF. "It seems those close to the collection all have a vested interest, be that familial, or from physical mention of their names in books written over 100 years ago. This is very difficult to ignore and is indicative of the Merrylin enigma."

Knowing full well the value of performance, CF gives no hint that the oddities that populate the collection are his own creations, nor will he discuss how any of them were constructed. On the contrary, they came into his possession, he insists, after he was contacted by an associate from the art world, who took him to a vast storage facility that held Merrylin's life work. There, he was told the story of the explorer and his strange acquisitions and was subsequently offered a position as custodian of the collection. CF was then shown his first specimen: H. Lupus, commonly known as a Lycanthrope or Werewolf.





The Oddities An' The Ecstacy *(From top) Alex CF among his many cryptid creations, the detailed pieces that comprise Rasputin, (inset) Forest Child and (opposite) Homo Uprus (Nosferatu)*

"I actually laughed with nervous excitement," he recalls. "Here I was confronted with something so far removed from reality, yet so familiar. It was frightening in its tangibility, but the science can reduce the awe to something almost pedestrian. Merrylin had a desire to know, and that desire led to fantastic, often terrifying things."

These terrifying things nevertheless contain a unique beauty: tiny demons with bodies no bigger than newborns lie frozen in death amongst scrawled notes and artefacts; the leathery wings of dragons, contorted and shriveled, entrance the onlooker. Each has a staggeringly dense backstory in the form of a lengthy and occasionally impenetrable piece of prose detailing how the specimen came to be. This is further expanded and developed in CF's *Encyclopaedia Obscura*, which contains a wealth of material that Hollywood filmmakers could make great use of if they were ever to come knocking on the door.

Elements of the occult are strongly presented throughout many of the exhibits in the collection, which convey a thorough knowledge of the Dark Arts. And it's not surprising to find, among the historical figures incorporated into the Merrylin history, the world's most notorious magician.

"One case involved the infamous Aleister Crowley and the Order of the Golden Dawn," reveals CF. "Merrylin exposed the

fraud by showing him the true face of magick. To Merrylin, the occult was simply a variation on fringe science. He was versed in various obscure ideologies and occult practices which defy our understanding of the physical laws. Within his writings we find many occurrences involving the invocation of non-corporeal entities, shunned deities and abominations that dwell in blackened places."

Such interests are embodied in pieces such as the Eldritch Study Bureau, one of the most complex examples of CF's work. It's a standing cabinet that, when opened, contains an astonishing array of Lovecraftian artefacts, including a Cthulhu idol accompanied by a miniature copy of the Necronomicon. The most striking object, however, is a creature of indeterminable origin, splayed open mid-dissection, allegedly a specimen belonging to William Dyer, the protagonist in some of Lovecraft's most infamous stories. Dyer's obsessive search for the Old Great Ones in many ways echoes CF's determination to pursue a mythos of his own creation. In true Lovecraftian fashion, he declares that Merrylin also discovered the secrets of immortality and prescience, both of which may have cost him his sanity.

"In earlier diaries he is a sensitive and passionate man with a yearning to do right by his family," explains CF. "Towards the 1850s he becomes secretive and cruel, and begins to form relationships with some unscrupulous people. He infiltrates various institutions and orders, with a view to tear them down. He enlists hired thugs to scare rival collectors and challenge authorities. In the years leading up to his disappearance, he becomes shadow-like and his presence diminished. He made many enemies and knew many influential people."

Once disbelief is suspended, it becomes clear just how all-encompassing the Merrylin Cryptid Museum can become. The amount of detail that goes into each piece is staggering, and is the defining quality that makes CF stand out from the imitators who are now starting to creep onto the scene. That, and his iron resolve not to break character.

"The simple fact is that, if his work is to be believed, it challenges every facet of reality," he responds when confronted with the fact that not a single shred of proof supports the existence of the creatures outside the collection itself.

Enter the world of madness and mythos at merrylinmuseum.com, where you will also be able to peruse CF's *Encyclopaedia Obscura* and, more importantly, become part of an enigmatic heritage by purchasing select items in the Museum, including a one-of-a-kind winged demon in a display case (Dante's Descent into The Pit), or a preserved infant Triceratops (The Triceratops Catalyst), to name but two.

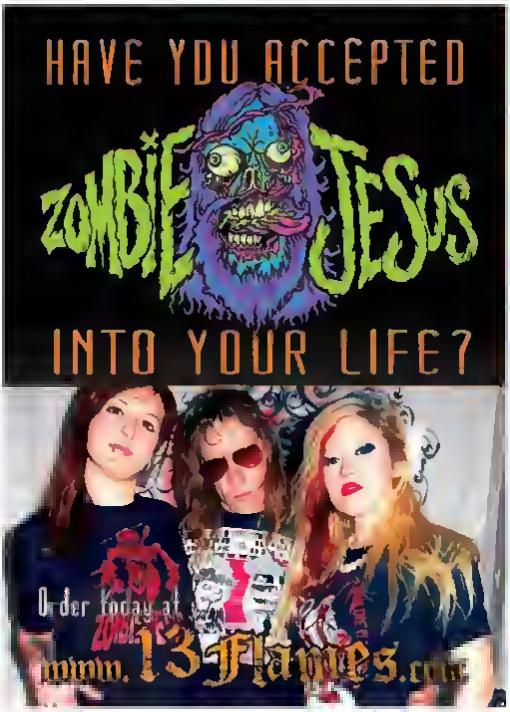
"We do have to sell the specimens to maintain the collection," says CF. "We are self-funded and although the board of trustees has garnered money for the initial housing and analysis of the collection, as curator I decided that various specimens can be sold to aid us in our pursuit of the ultimate goal, to fully understand Thomas Merrylin and his work."

Those yearning to peek further behind the curtain can do so at alexcf.com, where the artist has split his work into several sections, separating his illustrative and sculptural work. Prints and select pieces are also available to purchase directly from the online store, but for some of the larger items, it will be necessary to contact him directly.



Crypto Creations: *(From top) The intricate Eldritch Study Bureau, the Jackalope in its mummified state, and the Homo Vespertilius Chiropterus.*


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GEORGE WASHINGTON, PAUL REVERE AND BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FEND OFF AN UNDEAD REVOLUTION IN THE ORDER OF THE FORGE

THE BLOOD OF PATRIOTS

by APRIL SNELLINGS



NOW THAT THE GREAT EMANCIPATOR HAS TAKEN ON BLOODSUCKERS IN *ABRAHAM LINCOLN: VAMPIRE HUNTER* AND LEWIS AND CLARK ARE BRAWLING OFF AGAINST CRYPTIDS IN *MANIFEST DESTINY*, IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE AMERICA'S FOUNDING FATHERS GOT OFF TO BIG ASSOK AND KILLED SOME MONSTERS.

Enter *The Order of the Forge*, a three-issue miniseries debuting April 29 from Dark Horse Comics, which sees George Washington, Paul Revere and Benjamin Franklin run afoul of a supernatural plot to overthrow the British Empire.

Before you point out the obvious – aren't the heavies just saving the trio a lot of trouble? – know that *Forge* is set in 1753, which is 22 years before the colonies got on with the business of revolting. The tale is based on an original concept from producer Donn D. Berdahl, who passed the idea to British author Andy Briggs for further development. Briggs worked up a detailed treatment, which then found its way to writer Victor Gischler (*Deadpool: Merc with a Mouth*, *Wolverine: Revolver*) via Dark Horse editor Daniel Chabon. Quite the journey.

"I'd worked with Dan at Dark Horse on a couple of creator-owned projects [*Clown Fatale* and *Kiss Me, Satan*] and when the *Forge* team came looking for a writer, Dan thought I might be able to deliver what they were looking for," Gischler says. "They already had the characters and the basic story, but I think they wanted somebody who could give it a gritty, pulp edge. It seemed like the sort of thing I could really have some fun with, especially since they were willing to let me run wild up to a certain point."



The result is a cheeky first issue that opens with a 21-year-old Washington lashing out at his dad by taking a hatchet to the old man's favourite cherry tree. Washington loses control of his axe on the backswing, when he goes into the woods to retrieve it, he finds it embedded in a Native American totem pole. George gives his tool a jerk, and somehow both he and the hatchet are imbued with supernatural powers.

Six months later, Washington and teenaged smartass Paul Revere are in the employ of the shady Lord Hammond. They spend their free time dragging their middle-aged scientist pal Ben Franklin, out of Philadelphia brothels and keeping him sober enough to perform his experiments, but they'll soon turn their attention to their boss, who's got a line on an "ancient secret weapon" that he plans to use against England. Gischler is tight-lipped about the exact nature of the supernatural elements, but Juan Ferreyra's covers are replete with Viking zombies, snarling wolves and fire-breathing horses.

"We took iconic tidbits from each character's life and used them to sort of remind the reader [that] these are the historical figures you remember from US History class, but then took them in whatever direction we thought would be cool for the story," Gischler explains. "I think it's fun for readers to think, 'I recognize that,' but then we move on to the characters doing new and surprising things."

Though comparisons to *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* are inevitable, Gischler wisely gets more mileage from the book's characters than its high concept. Playful anachronisms and irreverent humour abound. Tazio Bettin's interior art is heavy on blood and boobs, and Gischler's script delights in taking the piss out of its players. For example, when we first meet Franklin, he's passed-out drunk beneath a pile of prostitutes; the eighteen-year-old Revere is a self-described "complete shit" who covets a thoroughbred horse the way his 21st-century counterpart would pine for a Porsche, and Washington, whose legendary honesty causes more trouble than it averts, drops f-bombs at every opportunity. ("If I have to hear about that fucking cherry tree one more time...")

"I think what I really brought to the table was tone," says Gischler, whose pulpy sensibilities have endeared him to comics fans. "The treatment was a much tamer, PG version of the story, but they made it clear they wanted me to take it in another direction – gritty, irreverent, bawdy at times; more adult, really. Adult language, adult situations. We didn't want to have to suggest or imply anything. Just let it all hang out, you know?"

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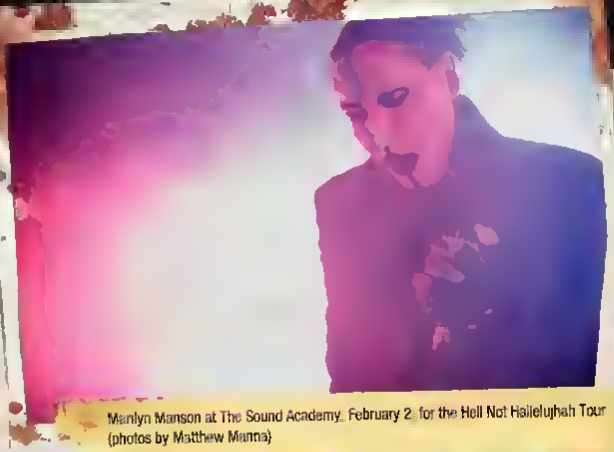
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MEMENTO MORGUE





Marilyn Manson at The Sound Academy, February 2, for the Hell Not Hallelujhah Tour (photos by Matthew Manna)







Filmmaker Alexandre Aja at the 2015 Gerardmer Fantastic Film Festival in France, and *Black Christmas* star Art Hindle is sandwiched by *Rue Morgue*'s Ghoulish Gary Pullin (left) and Dave Alexander after a screening of the film at The Royal cinema.





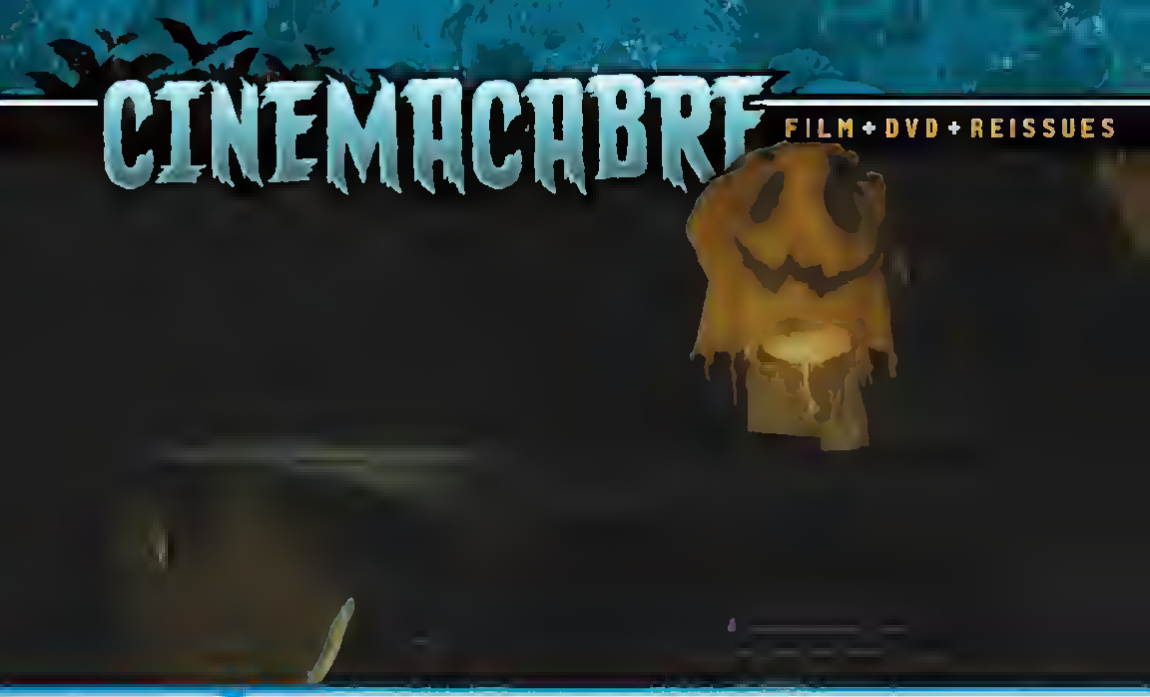


(L–R) Dave decides whether or not to open a door at the Stanley Kubrick exhibit at the TIFF Bell Lightbox. *RM* columnist The Gore-met with Aeon guitarist Zeb Nilsson after the band's show with Cannibal Corpse at The Phoenix Feb 24, and intern David Lidstone at the CineMacabre screening of *WolfCop*, Feb 19 at The Royal.

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CINEMACABRE

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DESPERATELY SEEKING MONSTERS

DIGGING UP THE MARROW

Starring Adam Green, Ray Wise and Will Barratt
Written and directed by Adam Green
Image Entertainment

Between countless fables situated in dangerous forests, Lovecraft's transdimentional horrors, or a literal Hell that exists below our feet, the idea that monsters live in the places we can't see is an old one. It's their elusiveness that not only draws our curiosity, but gives them life. With this concept, Adam Green's mock-doc *Digging Up the Marrow* takes us into the world of the unknown and its inhabitants.



Opening with convention floor footage of prominent monster kids, such as *Rue Morgue* cover artist Jason Edmiston, filmmaker Don Coscarelli and artist (also co-producer of this film) Alex Pardee discussing their reverence for creepy creatures, Green starts out in classic doc territory. But in no time flat, we're introduced to oddball William Dekker (Ray Wise) and both the film's focus, and its status as a genuine documentary are turned inside out. Green – playing a presumably snarkier version of himself – soon learns that monster appreciation can go too far, as Dekker claims to know the whereabouts of authentic beasties' a subterranean world that he dubs "The Marrow."

The director is dismissive at first but finally agrees to enter the woods with his cameraman, Will Barratt, in order to film the creatures in action. When the footage is shown to his colleagues, including *Hatchet* franchise star Kane Hodder, no one buys it, especially coming from an established horror filmmaker. This only increases Green's dedication to capturing unambiguous proof. Despite Dekker's warnings that the creatures have sensed something wrong and are becoming increasingly hostile, the filmmaker ventures once more into the darkness. And sure enough, something is awaiting his return.

At first, *Digging Up the Marrow*'s narrative shift comes dangerously close to losing the viewer altogether. Not only do you want to keep hearing people talk about monsters, but the introduction of the very recognizable Wise doesn't make for a subtle transition from doc to mock. That said, Wise and Green are so invested in their roles that issues of authenticity don't stand a chance against the men's surprisingly fun and captivating mission to unearth the mythical Marrow. A freaky good time.

TAL ZIMERMAN

SHE IS RISEN

THE LAZURUS EFFECT

Starring Olivia Wilde, Mark Duplass and Donald Glover
Directed by David Gelb
Written by Luke Dawson and Jeremy Slater
Relativity Studios

Maybe one day someone will make a cozy little horror movie in which scientific advances benefit the future of humanity. Sure, it's possible, right? For now though, the genre remains in Mary Shelley territory where scientists play god and get burned. *The Lazarus Effect* takes that theme pretty damn literally. It's about a group of scientists trying to cure death by bringing a body back from hell and must deal with the fiery consequences. There are times when that concept is executed well, but for the most part it's a pretty mediocre effort. At least it's over in a trim 83 minutes (including credits), so your disappointment might not truly sink in until halfway home.

Mark Duplass (*Creep*) and British beauty Olivia Wilde (*Turistas*) star as one of the least credible scientist couples in film history. Along with a pair of goofy twentysomething assistants/murder-set-piece-fodder (including *Community*'s Donald Glover) and a plucky young documentary filmmaker (Sarah Bolger, *The Moth Diaries*) left over from a



found footage draft of the script, the gang develops a serum that can conquer death.

At first they bring back a dog with vaguely creepy results, and then Wilde dies during an experiment and is resurrected on a whim. Unfortunately, she stopped off in hell before returning and brought back some demonic powers. Her eyes turn black and she can manipulate reality as the characters inevitably die off one-by-one in accordance with the rigid genre conventions that the screenwriters cling to in favour of anything resembling ingenuity.

The Lazarus Effect is an unadventurous B-movie. Early on, some charming performances and discussions of religion vs. science suggest complexity that never materializes, as director David Gelb (who also, oddly enough, made the acclaimed food documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*) increasingly resorts to tired stalk n' kill routines.

This being a Blumhouse Production picture (*Paranormal Activity*, *Insidious*, *Oculus*), it's at least slickly mounted and fast paced enough to pass through the eyeholes relatively painlessly. Too bad there's not much content or even some memorably gory set pieces to make *The Lazarus Effect* rise above so much lifeless competition.

PHIL BROWN

DOG SOLDIER

LATE PHASES

Starring Nick Damici, Ethan Embry and Lance Guest
Directed by Adrián García Bogliano
Written by Eric Stolze
Dark Sky Films

The horrors of the suburbs get crossbred with those of old age and lycanthropy in Argentinean filmmaker Adrián García Bogliano's English language debut *Late Phases*. Too bad the scares get lost in translation in his messy follow-up to the sexy and surreal *Here Comes the Devil* (*RM#141*).



Stakeland's Nick Damici stars as Ambrose, a blind Vietnam vet whose son has installed his obstinate old man into a retirement community located on the edge of a forest. Ambrose's discomfort at his new surroundings is made worse when his next-door neighbour and dog are dispatched the night he moves in – during a full moon. It doesn't take him much time to clue in that both were killed by a werewolf and that he has one month to figure out how to put the beast down for good.

Some of *Late Phases* works, specifically the cast. Except for the fact that Damici is in his 50s and his makeup isn't always convincing, he's believable as a hard-ass old soldier who regrets how he treated his family. His conversations with Tom Noonan (*Manhunter*, *The Monster Squad*), who plays a comforting priest, are thoughtful ruminations about age and war.

Unfortunately, too many ridiculous elements distract from some otherwise finely crafted drama. Most notably, Ambrose spends a lot of time waving a gun around, even going so far as to commission silver ammunition. That is standard operating procedure for a werewolf movie, but *he's blind!* And when the final siege happens, the retired vet, aided only by a crackly hearing aid and his heightened other senses, displays uncanny aim.

The film's other big failing is in the werewolf design. Even grading on a curve for budget, *Late Phases*' lycanthropes are mangy men in suits that inspire more eye-rolling than eye-gouging (although there is some of that).

Tonally, the film is all over the place. The humour is black, the drama is serious, and the horror is campy. Taken together it makes for a mutt of a movie.

SEAN PLUMMER



OUT FOR A STALK IN THE WOODS

TREEHOUSE

Starring J. Michael Trautmann, Dana Melanie and Daniel Fredrick
Directed by Michael G. Bartlett
Written by Alex Child and Miles Harrington
Uncork'd Entertainment

Never go full redneck. Y'see, there's a rich history of hillbilly horror movies that involve city slickers rubbing up against the bark of the local yokels with torturey/rapey/killy results. The subgenre's cliches are dug in deeper than, say, an Alabama tick, and there's no shortage of jokes about the three Bs of hillbilly horror: backward locals, backwoods danger and backside violations. So if you want your film to be taken seriously, you gotta work harder than a woodpecker in a petrified forest. Or something like that.



Treehouse, co-produced by Ed Sanchez of *The Blair Witch Project* fame, seems to avoid those narrative traps and begins with dead serious chills and suspense when a young woman, Elizabeth (Dana Melanie), comes home to find that someone has broken into the family farmhouse and abducted her younger brother. She grabs a shotgun and gives chase, only to disappear herself.

Enter Killian (J. Michael Trautmann), a bullied teenager whose older brother, Crawford (Daniel Fredrick), looks out for him. Despite a town curfew, in light of the missing kids, they sneak off to the woods with a backpack full of fireworks in order to meet up with some friends, and instead discover a towering treehouse. Inside is the missing girl, who's been hiding

from shadowy figures that stalk the forest. She's injured, so Crawford goes for help while Killian waits with her. The next morning, the pair discovers corpses hanging from the trees around them and realizes they're doomed if they don't try to sneak away. They painstakingly make it to a farmhouse, but – as these things often go – it turns out to be the last place they wanna get caught.

Director Michael G. Bartlett (*Zombie Diaries*, *The Paranormal Diaries*) gives us some realistic, likable characters to root for, genuinely frightening and savage antagonists, some brutally effective kills and constant tension as Killian and Elizabeth narrowly escape the killers' clutches before being forced to fight.

And then he goes and fucks it all up, thanks to a contrived *deus ex machina* ending that's pretty much a shotgun (well, assault rifle, technically) wedding between Jerry Bruckheimer action movie stupidity and some good ol' fashioned Bible-thumpin', reactionary vengeance – neither of which fit the previous tone of the movie. It's a shame to pan the *Treehouse* because of the last five minutes, but what the pickup truck were they thinking?

There's stupid, and then there's full redneck, dang it.

DAVE ALEXANDER

THE OMEGA NERDS

SOS: SAVE OUR SKINS

Starring Chris Hayward, Nat Saunders and Hannah Spear
Directed by Kent Sobey
Written by Chris Hayward and Nat Saunders
BBC

It's a grand old time to be a nerd, ain't it? Well, unless you're one of the hardcore British nerds Ben (Nat Saunders) and Stephen (Chris Hayward), who travel to New York for a sci-fi fan convention only to wake up on their first day to discover that everyone's vanished – fans, guests... in fact, everyone in the world, seemingly. With the phones out and the power running down, Stephen wants to find out what's going on and find a way to get home. Ben, on the other hand, mostly wants to find a burger.



Promising set up, right? It should be, as the geeks themselves observe, the "last man/men on Earth" has been the starting point for a host of more-acclaimed movies, and the comedy zingers in the first ten minutes fly thick and fast. But although the opening dialogue is snappy, the characters never progress beyond tired stereotypes that make the lads from *The Big Bang Theory* look like profound character studies in counterculture.

SOS tries to play some of the established tropes of sci-fi and horror for laughs (the ravenous monster, the creepy guy who has a plastic-lined room with your name on it), but it doesn't work. The nerds are so deeply disconnected from the real world that even in a comedy you expect them to have a much better idea of how to handle adventures and terrors directly out of the fantasy worlds they obsess over – or to be brought down to Earth with a bump that would need a lot more character development and insight than the writers have managed to imbue them with. In addition, the ending is utterly asinine: a one-liner that leaves our glorious heroes in the same position as they were at the beginning. Sometimes comedy needs to progress beyond the merely skin deep.

CLAIRE HORSNELL

YOUR AVERAGE KILLER

ATTACK OF THE MORNINGSIDE MONSTER

Starring Nicholas Brendon, Tiffany Shepis and Robert Pralgo
Directed by Chris Ethridge
Written by Jayson Palmer
MVD Media

Between stellar must-sees and horrible failures, a good chunk of our genre's real-estate is populated with the so-so. They're middle-of-the-road films that provide a bit of entertainment and are forgotten as soon as the credits roll. Add *Attack of the Morningside Monster* to that list.



Attack of the Morningside Monster

A series of ritual killings in the sleepy town of Morningside NJ, perpetrated by a killer best described as Ghostface-does-Mardi Gras, has the town sheriff (*Vampire Diaries*' Robert Pralgo) and his faithful deputy (scream queen Tiffany Shepis) working hard to solve the crimes before the murderer strikes again. It's a straightforward plot, told with straightforward direction and camerawork. There are a couple of subplots – one involving dumb-as-rocks drug dealers, another involving the sheriff's best friend (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Nicholas Brendon), and one featuring a history teacher tending to his terminally-ill wife – meant to add colour and drama to the narrative, as well as provide some necessary red herrings for the plot. There's no real mystery to the mystery here, though, if you have had any kind of exposure to slasher cinema, you'll see the twist from miles away.



That said, despite the pedestrian plotline and cinematography, the three aforementioned leads are solid, delivering performances above and beyond what the material calls for. Pralgo, in



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS GRAVE RESULTS

A COMEDY OF INNARDS



MY FAIR ZOMBIE

Camp Motion Pictures

When your city is overrun by zombies there's usually more running and screaming than dancing and singing, but that's not the case in this wonderful installment of the subgenre. Ottawa actor/writer/director Brett Kelly's take on the George Bernard Shaw play *My Fair Lady* hews fairly close to the original storyline about a Professor of phonetics who enters into a wager that he can pass off an ordinary cockney flower girl as an Edwardian era socialite – only this time the girl is a gut-munching zombie! Though the minimalist sets at times betray Kelly's miniscule budget, this is still an absolutely delightful film filled with witty dialogue, lavish gore and a memorable musical score. Just remember that the rain in Spain stems mainly from the brain!

BODY COUNT: 7
ZOMBIE COUNT: 19

ON UNDEADLY GROUND



ZOMBIE ISLE

World Wide Multi Media

Remember going on field trips with your high school science class and being dropped off in a forest somewhere so you could pretend to catalogue the flora and fauna while actually looking for a place to make out or get high? Me neither, but that's the premise of this flick about botany students on a trip to a remote island who are hunted by zombies. Made to look like a forgotten exploitation-era film, the washed out "print" is packed with kick-ass gore and topped off with the pre requisite Nazi mad scientist. The only thing missing is gratuitous nudity, but it gets by without it. Next time you go on a field trip you might want to steer clear of Zombie Isle though, can I suggest Cannibal Cove or Bigfoot Bay?

BODY COUNT: 21
ZOMBIE COUNT: 27

CRIMSON AND CLOVER



ABOUT A ZOMBIE

Revolver

Anyone who's been to Ireland may have thought that they were caught in the middle of a zombie uprising when the pubs closed down and the stumbling, mooning drunks spilled into the streets. This faux documentary from the Emerald Isle follows a family that has decided to take care of its infected son rather than turn him over to the authorities to be exterminated. Though plodding and dry at times, *About a Zombie* adeptly records the prejudice, fear and anger that the family experiences on a daily basis from their neighbours and co-workers, and raises intriguing questions about the roles of government and the Church during a zombie apocalypse. Never mind your Lucky Charms, it's your brains that Irish zombies find magically delicious!

BODY COUNT: 46
ZOMBIE COUNT: 74

LAST CHANCE LANCE

particular, has an easygoing, everyman charm as Sheriff Haulk. So, while *Morningside Monster* doesn't reach necessary viewing status, it also fails to be worthy of ridicule. File it under "D" for DK.

RON MCKENZIE

UNDEAD DUST-UP

FRANKENSTEIN VS. THE MUMMY

Starring Max Rhyser, Ashton Leigh and Robert MacNaughton
Written and directed by Damien Leone
RLJ Entertainment

Haven't we all been to a wedding where two old guys hit the bar a little too hard and start fist fighting? Sad, right? In the case of *Frankenstein vs. The Mummy*, we bear witness to a couple of dusty icons having a modern-day scrap, but whether they can still pack a punch remains to be seen.

Victor Frankenstein (Max Rhyser) and Nahla Khalil (Ashton Leigh) are young, hip professors at a medical school where, in addition to falling in love, they lead their respective fields. Dr. Frankenstein earns a living by delivering philosophical gobbledygook to classrooms of tired college students, and by night buys shady body parts from a pervy janitor (Robert MacNaughton) for use in reanimation experiments. Dr. Khalil has just returned from Egypt with the remains of a sadistic and possibly (OK, probably) cursed pharaoh. In fine Frankensteinian form, Victor creates a being from body parts, but since his brain comes courtesy of the evil janitor, his creation is just a big, undead asshole.

Meanwhile, Khalil's pharaoh has awakened and starts his campaign of global domination, one unsuspecting intern at a time. Oh yeah, he's also an undead asshole. And if you think that with two undead assholes on the loose, an epic, centuries-in-the-making monster fight must follow, kindly refer to the drunken wedding scrap analogy at the start of this review.



On the positive side of this clunker, are writer/director Damien Leone's monster makeups. The main baddies look pretty wicked (even if the Monster resembles comic book character Evil Ernie more than anything traditional), and the selection of throat slashings, brain removals and other bloodlettings are crafted as well as you could hope for. There just aren't enough of them.

To be fair, the monster rally films that dot horror cinema's history have seldom held up to any serious critique, so *Frankenstein vs. The Mummy* isn't interrupting an untarnished tradition of excellence. Still, it won't go down like when Uncle Mike punched out Uncle Rick for spilling beer on his blazer. That was at least funny.

TAL ZIMERMAN

REISSUES



LITTLE RED RAINCOAT

DON'T LOOK NOW (1973) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring Julie Christie, Donald Sutherland and Hilary Mason
Directed by Nicolas Roeg
Written by Allan Scott and Chris Bryant
The Criterion Collection

The works of famed English author and playwright Daphne du Maurier have been adapted into a number of films and TV projects, including Alfred Hitchcock classics *Rebecca* (1940) and *The Birds* (1963). Her 1970 novella, *Don't Look Now* (featured in the collection *Not After Midnight*) made the transition to the screen three years later under the direction of cinematographer-turned-filmmaker Nicolas Roeg (*Walkabout*), and the film remains one of the most unique, albeit tragic films of the period.

John Baxter (Donald Sutherland *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) and his wife Laura (Julie Christie *Demon Seed*) have lost their young daughter Christine to a drowning accident. Trying to move on with their lives, they temporarily relocate to Venice, where John has been commissioned to restore a crumbling cathedral. There, the couple meets two elderly sisters – Heather (Hilary Mason *Dolls*), who is blind, and Wendy (Clelia Matania). Heather happens to have psychic abilities and informs Laura that she has "seen" Christine; the news comforts the still-grieving mother but upsets the rational-minded John.



Desperate for contact with her daughter, Laura attends a séance with the sisters and is told her husband is in grave danger and that they should leave Venice immediately. Meanwhile, a serial killer is on the loose, and John, who is experiencing strange occurrences of his own, repeatedly sees a small figure in a red jacket who resembles his daughter, running through the city's mist-shrouded alleyways.

A true classic, there's much to recommend here: brilliant direction by Roeg, gorgeous photography by Anthony Richmond, a hauntingly beautiful score by Pino Donaggio (who would go on to work on numerous films for directors Brian De Palma and Joe Dante), the faultless performances of Sutherland and Christie, and an unforgettably eerie ending.

Making its North American Blu-ray debut, courtesy of Criterion, the release sports a superbly restored 4K transfer and a plethora of extras (some of which are carried over from a previous UK release), including a making-of documentary with Roeg, Sutherland, Christie and screenwriter Allan Scott; a featurette focusing on Roeg's directorial style, with interviews from directors Steven Soderbergh and Danny Boyle; a conversation with editor Graeme Clifford; an interview with Donaggio; the theatrical trailer and more. A multilayered, slow-burning thriller, *Don't Look Now* has finally been given its proper due as a richly cinematic and emotional experience.

JAMES BURRELL

A NEW NIGHTMARE

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1989) Blu-ray

Starring Robert Englund, Jill Schoelen and Alex Hyde-White
Directed by Dwight H. Little
Written by Gerry O'Hara and Duke Sandefur
MGM / Scream Factory

Back in 1989, MGM's decision to re-make Gaston LeRoux's *The Phantom of the Opera* must have seemed pretty solid. The novel had just come into the realm of the public domain, which meant that they wouldn't have to pay for the rights to use the title, Andrew Lloyd Webber's lavish musical was thrilling audiences from Toronto to Tokyo, and they had access to a historic Opera House and a series of elaborate sets that had already been built and paid for in Budapest, Hungary. So why was it such a box office flop?

It was probably the fact that, despite the casting of Robert "Freddy Krueger" Englund as the Phantom and Jill Schoelen (*The Stepfather*) as heroine Christine Day, most moviegoers had no idea that director Dwight H. Little (*Halloween 4*) had decided to turn LeRoux's tragic tale into a slasher movie.



For although it may in fact be closer to the darker tone of the original novel, the sheer number of dismemberments, disembowellings and decapitations probably felt vulgar and startlingly out of place in what had become commonly thought of as a romantic tragedy.

There was also the baffling decision to stray from the novel's Parisian settings, in this version, the film opens in contemporary New York City, where Christine is knocked unconscious while auditioning for a role in a musical, only to awaken in Victorian England where she's the understudy at a popular Opera House. It's here that the story finally begins to resemble the source material as she's wooed by the mysterious Phantom, whom she believes is the angel of her late father, teaching



her to become a famous singer.

This Blu-ray release includes a wonderfully intimate audio commentary with Englund and Little, and a fabulous making-of featurette that details the incredible work put into creating the musical score and makeup effects, and the love the actors had for the project despite its incredibly dangerous sets.

Its flaws aside, this *Phantom*'s still a fun throwback for anyone who missed it the first time around and would rather see their deformed psychopaths slicing and dicing than singing and dancing.

LAST CHANCE LANCE

OUT WITH THE OLD

NEW YEAR'S EVIL (1980) Blu-ray

Starring Roz Kelly, Kip Niven and Grant Cramer
Directed by Emmett Alston
Written by Leonard Neubauer
Scream Factory

From *Black Christmas* to *Halloween* to *My Bloody Valentine*, the holiday-themed slasher is one of the most beloved traditions in horror. An early Cannon production, 1980's *New Year's Evil* jumped on the trend early, and while it is definitely a slasher, it also deviates significantly from the routine antics of Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers.



The story centres on Diane Sullivan (Ros Kelly), host of a ridiculous music party show featuring a house band that sounds like Ronnie James Dio on downers and has members in a combination of hair metal, new wave and early punk getups. (This is what happens when adults make movies about things they think their kids are into).

On the Dec 31st show, Sullivan starts receiving calls from a mysterious man speaking into a voice box who calls himself Evil (clever) and promises to kill a "naughty girl" at midnight of every time zone. The key narrative choice is that the killer's identity isn't a mystery, nor is he an unstoppable masked madman. Instead, he's the character the audience spends the most time with, as he drives around LA in various disguises, killing women in not-particularly interesting ways while a frustrated detective is predictably useless at stopping him. The movie is almost like a cop thriller that incorporates then-modern hack n' slash conventions.

Predictably, there are also plenty of moments of unintentional humour, including a cat that screeches without opening its mouth, the killer's mic in plain view in the back of his white tennis suit (thanks, Blu-ray clarity) and the horrible power metal song that never stops playing. The trouble is that it's never quite ridiculous enough, let alone competent enough, to be taken seriously. Give it a drunk and raucous crowd and *New Years Evil* should be sufficiently entertaining, but there's not enough suspense, gore, atmosphere or screw-ups for it to stand out against the legions of its slasher brethren.

Previously released only as a DVD-R, Scream Factory has rescued *New Year's Evil* and dressed it up nice and pretty with a new HD transfer. The bonus features are mostly boring, but do provide some interesting tidbits regarding the movie's place in the lore of Cannon Films. There are much better '80s slashers to be had, but completists can still pop their corks over this one.

AARON VON LUPTON

SEMI-SWEET

CANDYMAN: FAREWELL TO THE FLESH (1995) Blu-ray

Starring Tony Todd, Kelly Rowan and Veronica Cartwright
Directed by Bill Condon
Written by Mark Kruger, Rand Ravich and Clive Barker
Scream Factory

Ah, '90s horror... it makes sense that such a confused, frustrated decade would give birth to some confused, frustrated franchises, and buried amidst those messes were the *Candyman* films. For a decade partially defined by a re-examination of race relations, the titular character – the vengeful ghost of a lynched black artist – could have been a horror icon for Gen-X. Unfortunately, the series never completely delivered on the promises it made with the first entry, as evidenced with *Farewell to the Flesh*.

The film begins with the Tarrant family, decades ago, its patriarch was brutally murdered during an occult ritual apparently meant to eliminate the hook-handed, bee-chested Candyman (played again by Tony Todd). The resultant scandal forever stigmatized Tarrant's wife and children, who have carried the legacy of the boogeyman their entire lives. Now, Tarrant's daughter Annie (Kelly Rowan), a school teacher, attempts to assuage her students' fears that the Candyman is real by summoning him up. Unfortunately, when the Candyman comes calling for her, his grudge is uniquely personal.



For the first hour, *Farewell* surpasses the quality of the original, with a unique horror take on the Tennessee Williams-style of seaming family drama. The final half hour, though, falls to pieces, once Annie becomes the Final Girl, Rowan proves that she wasn't ready to carry a film on her own. It's a failing amplified by the final act's many plot holes and *deus ex machinas* twists. Worst, though, is the wildly inconsistent portrayal of the Candyman, who moves between mindless sadist, vengeful spectre and misunderstood altruist. Any of those characterizations would have worked, and Todd does his best to sell each one, too bad the writers couldn't reach a consensus for the character.

Still, *Farewell* is worth a look. The transfer ranks as some of the best work Scream Factory has done, bringing to Blu-ray all of the fantastically sleazy aesthetics of mid-'90s horror. The disc also contains a new interview with Todd, as well as new commentary from director Bill Condon, who has achieved fame of late for his role in bringing us – shudder – *Twilight: Breaking Dawn*. Guess he had nowhere to go but down.

PRESTON FASSEL

THE

LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

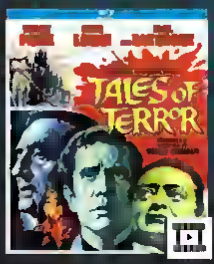
FILE: Eye-Popping Poe

by Paul Corupe



During his ascendancy to King of the B's, Roger Corman banked on straightforward creature features – complete with armies of giant crabs, aliens and undersea terrors attacking square-jawed heroes – but made a creative leap at the dawn of the 1960s when he refocused on films depicting inner terror. Drawing from his own interest in modern art, Corman's influential series of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations allowed the director to explore mood and more abstract horrors in a way that was previously prohibited by his bootstrap budgets. Working in Cinemascope and colour for the first time, he used groundbreaking psychedelic dream and hallucination sequences to approximate altered mental states and conjure up the dread within them. Hitting Blu-ray this month from Kino, 1962's *Tales of Terror* is the third in Corman's Poe series starring Vincent Price, and shows the director experimenting with striking production design and camera tricks to bring more intangible monsters to life.

Released following *House of Usher* (1960) and *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), *Tales of Terror* features three stories ostensibly about the different stages of death, each featuring Price in a different role. In the first story, "Morella," Price plays Locke, a Roderick Usher-like figure leading a solitary life in a grand but empty estate which is disrupted by his estranged daughter (Maggie Pierce), whose visit becomes the perfect time for his dead wife, Morella, to exact her revenge. Next up is the comedy-infused "The Black Cat" (mixed with a little of Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"), in which spirited drunk Montresor Herringbone (Peter Lorre) discovers that professional wine aficionado Fortunato Lucresi (Price) has been dallying with his wife (Joyce Jameson). Herringbone chains the adulterers in his basement and entombs them behind a brick wall – but he accidentally seals up his pet cat too, and loud purring tips off the police to his crime. Finally, in "The Case of Mr. Valdemar," hypnotist Mr. Carmichael (Basil Rathbone) manages to extend the precise moment of passing in the elderly Valdemar (Price), and uses this prolonged living death to steal away his unsuspecting patient's wife (Debra Paget).



Famously, Corman kicked off the Poe series by convincing his backers at AIP that a full-colour picture he could make on a fifteen-day shoot would be better than the two black-and-white features on a ten-day shoot he had been asked to direct. Though more commonly celebrated for their Gothic elements, Corman's colourful, artistic approach puts a unique stamp on the Poe films that is immediately apparent from the opening credit sequences, from the evocative multi-hued smoke of *House of Usher* to the swirling oil paint of *The Pit and the Pendulum*. Just as otherworldly and ominous, *Tales of Terror* introduces its three stories with stylized scenes of striking red imagery against a black background, including a thumping heart, red cat paw prints that proceed from one end of the frame to the other and a series of blood drips, each accompanied with some ominous narration by Price.

But the aesthetic pays off best in Corman's dream and hallucination sequences, which increased in frequency and daring throughout the Poe cycle. These scenes, packed with gels and tints, distorted lenses and Freudian symbolism, were intended to expand the action beyond the handful of sets. Following *House of Usher*'s dry ice-drenched nightmare sequence and *The Pit and the Pendulum*'s tinted flashbacks, *Tales of Terror* features the series' most macabre fantasy sequence yet. Collapsing drunk on his bed, Herringbone imagines that Lucresi and his wife smash through the basement brick wall to attack him, ultimately decapitating him and playing a rousing game of catch with his protesting head. Unlike in the last two films, it's intended only for morbid laughs; Corman uses a distorted lens to make the scene a funhouse-mirror reflection, approximating a drunken delusion as Herringbone is overcome with guilt.

Corman's proto-psychedelic flourishes evolved throughout the 1960s, resulting in some of the best films of his career. Aside from *Tales of Terror*, fascinating works like *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964) and *The Wild Angels* (1966) highlight the low-budget auteur's extraordinary progression from tossed off fare like *Creature From the Haunted Sea* (1961). While Corman's depictions of self-exploration via hallucination culminated in his LSD double-feature, *The Trip* (1967) and *Psych-Out* (1968), *Tales of Terror* is an effective landmark on the way there, a film that allowed him to draw on untapped creativity to show that the scariest monsters are the ones that live in our own head.

IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Fool's Gold

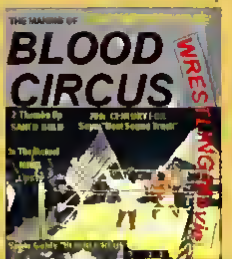
by John W. Bowen



I've seen some strange shit on screens big and small in my time but seldom have I witnessed anything that left me seriously doubting my own sanity. In fact, it's only happened once and the culprit wasn't directed by David Lynch, Don Coscarelli or Mark Savage, nor was the name Troma associated with it. But you'd best believe it was profoundly fucking weird. How profoundly fucking weird? Well, if it were a flavour of ice cream, that flavour would be called Profoundly Fucking Weird. And it began with an infomercial.

It was 1988, I was working evening shifts and upon returning home I would frequently wind up watching pretty much anything on TV. When the late-late movie ended around 3am or so, a fairly innocuous-looking infomercial would get underway hawking "Santo Gold" a line of gold-plated junk jewellery. The announcer would then take a moment to regale you with "goodwill messages" such as "Say something nice and kind to the very next person you see!"

And then a title card would appear, which the announcer would read aloud, presumably in case anyone found the errors in spelling and punctuation too traumatic to bear. (For authenticity I've left in said mistakes.) "Ladies and Gentleman, Hold it right there! What you are about to see is a phenomenom that's sweeping across the country! Some people wonder what the Santo Gold 24-karat gold process has in common with wrestling!"



One whiplash-inducing shift of gears later we're witnessing clips from the sci-fi horror comedy *Blood Circus*. Why? Because Santo Gold also makes sci-fi horror comedies about wrestlers sent to Earth from the planet Zoran to tangle with fighters from the US and the Soviet Union! But these Zoranian baddies are no regular space wrestlers, not content to simply pin their opponents for the usual three-count, the interstellar bastards kill and eat them, as evidenced by footage of severed heads flying into the laps of startled spectators in the front row and one that turns up in the trunk of a car presumably for variety's sake. Oh, and there are a couple of dissolves to ghostly, shrouded figures with halos, telling each other really bad jokes.

Blood Circus is reputed to star a bunch of washed-up grapplers from early WWF days although the only one I recognized was Ox Baker, who had previously made the mistake of getting into the ring with Snake Plissken in *Escape From New York*. In an apparent nod – intentional or otherwise – to William Castle, audience members are offered free "scream bags." (What's a scream bag? Dunno, but apparently they're still being hawked on eBay.)

Then there's Santo Gold himself, climbing out of a limo, about five-foot-fuck-all, rockin' a white *Miami Vice*-issue drug lord suit, aviator glasses, gay porn moustache, chestnut-brown toupee (apparently fashioned from SOS pads), and enough Santo Gold hardware around his neck to induce early onset sciatica.

Hitting the stage, backed by a fifteen piece band, he busts his dope rhyme, call-and-response style, with his backup singers. "I got chains, I got charms (Santo Gold, Santo Gold)/I got bracelets for your arms! (Santo Gold, Santo Gold)." As the screaming crowd eggs him on, he goes all Improv like Van Morrison on bath salts, screaming "WE GOT GOOOOOLD, BABY! SANTO GOOOOOLD!"

And then it was over, and no one else I knew had seen or even heard of it for the next couple of decades. Santo Gold became my singing frog – my own personal Mr. Snuffleupagus – until somebody invented the internet and vindicated my sorry ass.

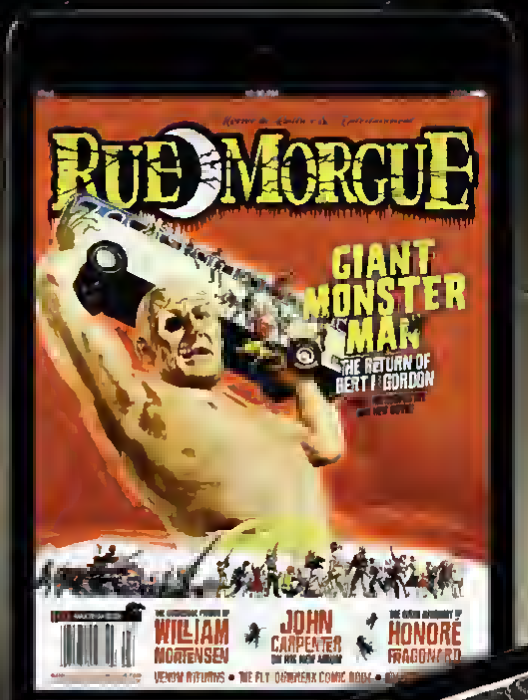
Blood Circus was REAL! Well, maybe. The only a handful of people claim to have seen the movie and all that survives is about ten minutes of clips on YouTube interspersed with footage from the infomercial. According to some sources, the home video rights were sold six or seven years ago, though nothing has been released to date. According to others, Santo Gold himself – a.k.a. Baltimore native Santo Victor Rigatuso, a.k.a. Robert Harris – did a short stint in jail for mail fraud when it was all over.

Regardless, it was a huge relief to find out I didn't just hallucinate the whole thing. (Hey, it's happened before.) Because, just like that scream bag. If it's an obscure, pointless pop culture artifact, you'll find it on the Internet. And if it's obscure and pointless and even remotely horror-related, I'll probably write about it. So, as that dying character said in that young adult novel, "Get the hell out of my basement, Ponyboy. And stay GOOOOOLD!"

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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

COMIC REVIEWS BY **PEDRO CABEZUELO**

Welcome to Harrow County, a picturesque farming community nestled in 1930s America. But beneath the idyllic veneer lies a deadly secret. Eighteen years earlier, the townsfolk got together and burned themselves a genuine, devil-worshipping, baby-eating witch named Hester. As is usual at these bonfires, Hester managed to spit out one final curse before being toasted.

And so opens *Harrow County*, a new backwoods horror series (starting this month) from writer Cullen Bunn (*The Empty Man*) and artist Tyler Crook (*Bad Blood*) that casts its spells into the wild world of witchcraft. Witches have been relatively ignored in today's horror comic landscape, but with new titles such as Scott Snyder's *Wytches*, Archie's *Sabrina* and now *Harrow County*, that glaring oversight may soon be rectified.

"I grew up in rural North Carolina, and my dad and uncles were always telling tall tales about witches and ghosts and other 'boogers' who dwelt out in the deepest, darkest parts of the woods," says Bunn. "For some reason, the stories about witches were always the most frightening to me. I'm not talking about real world witches and wiccans, of course. I'm talking about the witches that inspire fear in people – the witches who would run off in the dead of night to dance with goat-like beasts on barren hilltops, played out alien tunes on drums made of human flesh, who stole babies from their cribs on cold nights, replacing them with twisted and mewling creatures."



At the centre of *Harrow County*'s tale is Emmy, a farm girl about to turn eighteen, who lives with her father. She's immediately likeable: friendly, inquisitive and compassionate. However, Emmy also has a talent for curing near-dead livestock,and she is plagued by nightmares of the crooked tree outside her window – the same tree from which Hester was hanged and burned eighteen years ago. As the story progresses, we learn of even more connections between Emmy and Hester, which may mean dire consequences for everybody.

"The story that would become *Harrow County* was born when a single sentence popped into my head: 'Her earliest memories were of the bleating of goats and the taste of freshly turned earth,'" reveals Bunn. "I immediately started writing the story of this girl who had some sort of strange connection to the land, people and ghosts around her. When Tyler and I started talking about a book we could work on together, I threw the idea out to him, and he latched onto it. Thus, *Harrow County* was born."

Just as the people around Emmy don't exactly know what to make of her, readers are also left wondering whether she's ultimately a force for good or evil. This ambiguity is one of the more intriguing aspects of the book and it is quite deliberate.

"A huge part of this story, especially the first four issues, is Emmy's discovery of who she is, where she came from and if she should embrace the dark destiny that's ahead of her," explains Bunn. "She's not sure where she's headed. Her actions could very easily take some very dark turns. The world around her has just been turned upside down. She's unsure of things that she has, up until now, taken for granted. The path she's treading is ambiguous."

While Emmy is certainly the protagonist of the series, the backwoods environment is a big character in the story and artist Tyler Crook imbues every tree, branch and leaf with a palpable quality that is both eerie and seductive. This near personification of nature speaks to the elements of witchcraft that Bunn wishes to convey.



***Harrow County**: Farm girl Emmy is plagued by the supernatural.*

"Witchcraft in *Harrow County* is more primordial than you have seen in most stories," he says. "It's an almost elemental force that influences everything around it. Harrow County is a hotbed of mysterious, ghostly activity, and witchcraft is at the heart of it all."

Crook is equally adept at rendering people with a warm style that immediately draws the reader to the character. However, a key theme of the story is that looks can be deceiving.

"Tyler's art in this story dances along this line between charming folksiness and disturbing creepiness," says Bunn. "He brings so much personality to his characters. It's almost impossible not to fall in love with them. But underneath it all, you know there is something sinister and icky stirring, just waiting to make itself known."

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO

QUICK CUTS

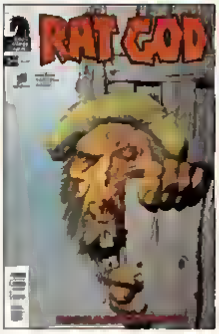


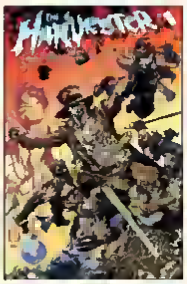
Bahdoon is a boy serving as translator on board a ship of ruthless Somali pirates. While scouring the seas, the boat comes across what appears to be an abandoned American vessel. Boarding, Bahdoon and his mates come across the gruesome remains of the crew, and soon realize they're in danger of sharing the same fate. Making *Plunder*'s protagonists Somali adds a nice twist to an otherwise familiar horror trope, and Swifty Lang does a great job of introducing the large cast of characters and giving them each distinct personalities. Plus, Skuds McKinley does a fantastic job displaying the carnage onboard the vessel, starting subtly with stray drops of blood before uncovering several disemboweled and severed corpses. The cause of the bloodshed is yet to be revealed but will hopefully live up to the mayhem seen in this first issue.



This volume reprints the first six issues of *Outcast*, which introduce us to reluctant exorcist Kyle Barnes, who has been surrounded by cases of demonic possession all his life, including his mother and ex-wife. He has the ability to spot those possessed, and in most cases is able to drive the demon out. As the series progresses, it's clear that Kyle is merely a pawn in a much larger game being played by malevolent forces waiting anxiously in the wings. *Outcast* is a tough nut to crack; it's certainly well-written and drawn, and its episodes of demonic possession suitably grim and tense. But Kyle is a difficult character to grasp, and even after six issues, he remains mostly a cypher, keeping the reader at arm's length. Undoubtedly this is writer Robert Kirkman's design, but he makes it tough to care about what's happening within the character's world. Less patient readers will find the title boring.

Vicki Mills is a grad student studying urban legends. Her latest thesis is on The Harvester, a mysterious figure that has been popping up for the last 150 years, maiming or killing those it perceives to be sinners, often *en masse*. Vicki is contacted by journalist Justin Luster, who's investigating a series of mass murder cold cases whose pattern appear to match those of the mythical Harvester. Together, they hope to solve the riddle and determine if it's all just urban legend or something more dangerous. By the end of the first issue, Brandon Seifert has answered the question of the Harvester's veracity, but rather than stopping this mystery dead, one gets the impression that the writer merely wants to get that aspect of the story out of the way in order to deal with the full ramifications of that revelation. We get a brief glimpse of the Harvester's mayhem, albeit in the context of one of Vicki's lectures, so Seifert seems to be whetting our appetite. Eric Battle's artwork captures the necessary havoc and I can't wait for *The Harvester* to begin in earnest.





After a series of stunning Poe adaptations, Richard Corben re-sharpens his pencils for *Rat God*, an original tale combining elements of Lovecraft and Native American folklore. While the two may seem like an odd match, he's managed to fuse them into an intriguing narrative along with his usual breathtaking artwork. Native American siblings Achak and Kito flee from threats – both human and supernatural – in the forests outside of Arkham. Meanwhile, in town, a young man named Clark Elwood reminisces of his meeting with Kito at Miskatonic University shortly before being attacked by a savage creature. But why does he remember Kito as a white woman? The combination of the two seemingly disparate topics is jarring at first. This, along with the many questions that arise from the story itself, may very well send readers back to page one for a second look. Not a bad thing, because the combination of Corben's art with his unusual hybrid tale begs for repeated readings.

Four stories pitting pompoms versus the living dead? Specific Niche?, isn't it? In *Zombies vs Cheerleaders St. Patty's Day Special* a cheerleading squad is trapped in a supermarket and must contend with zombies and tainted girl scout cookies; a couple of cheerleaders on their way to a St. Patty's party take a shortcut through the woods with deadly results; a 19th century Victorian cheerleader fights steam punk zombies; and a young woman forces her lover to dress up as the undead for some kinky – and fatal – sex. Of the four tales, only the last lands with a thud – the other three are glorious fun, equally dishing blood and laughs, with the Victorian tale especially clever and imaginative.





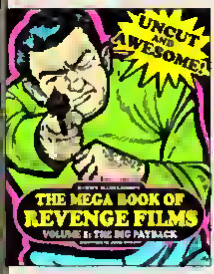


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Danny Mananino
Total Gavone Publishing

Who doesn't love a good revenge story? Nobody. If you said different, you're lying. Vengeance is a time-tested human instinct that, like it or not, can happily take up residence in any type of movie. It's likely crept into several of your favourite films without you even noticing, which is exactly what you will find when reading Danny Mananino's *The Mega Book of Revenge Films Volume 1: The Big Payback*.



The 300-plus page guide is mostly a collection of capsule reviews categorized by genres, including martial-arts, blaxploitation and horror, with a series of lists, mini-essays and interviews interspersed within them. There are sections devoted to things such as international Rambo rip-offs, most memorable villains, and cinema's best threats and one-liners. Conversations with an assortment of cinematic bruisers, including Fred "The Hammer" Williamson and Lance Henriksen, are guaranteed to please fans of tough-guy cinema.

That said, Mananino's choices are overly inclusive and even films that don't necessarily place revenge front and centre – *The Goonies*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *The Ten Commandments*, to name but a few – are placed alongside classic revenge epics *Death Wish*, *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Walking Tall*. Of course, this only serves as further proof of the convenience and attraction that filmmakers and audiences have for the vengeance-as-plot-device.

I was a little put off by Mananino's writing style, which can come off as overly casual; "Listen, revenge rules, I love sexy girl leads and I dig this movie," he writes on Abel Ferrara's *Ms. 45*. And yet, I admit that the meathead approach may be fitting given the simplistic nature of most the films.

Every so often, a revenge film can take us to places where we question humankind's everlasting lust for violence, its cost and its effect. But mostly it's about visceral enjoyment of seeing the odds evened and balance restored. In other words, the dudespeak fits the subject matter neatly, and clearly Mananino (whose previous claim to fame was punching out Glenn Danzig on tape) has done his homework.

TAL ZIMERMAN

GRINDHOUSE NOSTALGIA MEMORY, HOME VIDEO AND EXPLOITATION FILM FANDOM

David Church
Edinburgh University Press

Grindhouse Nostalgia is a serious study of a subject rarely treated seriously, namely exploitation cinema and its enduring allure. But, as the title suggests, this is not a guide, nor overview, of psychotronic cinema, instead of evaluating the films themselves, David Church's subject is, rather, the impression that they have left in the cultural memory, i.e. the ways their initial reception (in drive-ins and grindhouses) has been shaped and reshaped through newer media such as VHS, DVD and Blu-ray. A special stress is put on the recent cycle of anachronistic exploitation throwbacks, which the author calls *retrosploitation*, "because it also recalls the retro-coded remediation of archival exploitation texts as a related tendency to blend ironic distance and nostalgic sincerity within home video's contemporary appeals."

The academic jargon is sometimes heavier than really necessary, perhaps to conceal that many of the book's revelations are not so profound – nor surprising. Yes, trailers typically promise more than the featured films can possibly deliver. Yes, memory is tricky and nostalgia inevitably adds colour that may not have existed. Still, some of Church's points deserve consideration, like his claim that "an accurate history of drive-in theatres must avoid overemphasizing the ratio of exploitation films to mainstream product, as these exhibition sites were not always the contra-Hollywood hotbeds that exploitation fan cultures have often claimed."

The book is most valuable in dealing with the retrosploitation cycle – invigorated by the pastiches of Tarantino and Rodriguez – and its analysis of the subtle shades between parody and homage. It's a pity that Church does not elaborate his distinction between Tarantino and a retro-stylist like Guy Maddin, nor does he deal with more ambitious and artistically accomplished films clearly modelled on the grind house fodder: imported giallos (*Amer*), SF B-flicks (*Beyond the Black Rainbow*) and Satanic slashers (*House of the Devil*). In spite of that, this is a worthy and thought-provoking study, especially noteworthy in the part dealing with rape-revenge films, and deserves the attention and endurance of those with a more scholarly inclination.



DEJAN DONJANOVIC

MEMENTO MORI

Paul Koudounaris
Thames & Hudson

Paul Koudounaris travels the world to capture with his camera what we leave behind. In *Empire of Death: A Cultural History of Ossuaries and Charnel Houses* (2011) he showcases ossuaries from across the globe, providing stunning pictures along with detailed histories of the sites and their meanings (see *RM#117*). *In Heavenly Bodies: Cult Treasures and Spectacular Saints From the Catacombs* (2013), he trained his lens on revered skeletons covered in unbelievably ornate brocade, jewellery and other accoutrements, which are scattered among various holy sites in Europe (*RM#139*). Koundounaris also contributes to this publication, and his piece on 18th century French anatomist Honore Fragonard was featured in our last issue (*RM#153*), along with bizarre pictures of Fragonard's proto-Bodyworlds displays.

His latest book, *Memento Mori*, features images of remains – from across the world – that are kept on display for a variety of compelling reasons. They reveal cultural practices (both past and present) that embody much different attitudes towards death than those of modern North Americans. Opening with a remarkably insightful essay about evolving attitudes towards the deceased throughout





history, Koudounaris then offers us over 200 full-colour, glossy pages (plus a fold-out) detailing his morbid adventures – realized through some of the most jaw-dropping imagery you'll ever encounter.

Among the arresting subjects is the mummy of a little girl, which was found in a cave in Indonesia and "taken in" by a family that put the corpse in a cute dress and now keeps it in their home as a member of the household. In Bolivia, skulls adorned with hats, sunglasses and paint are displayed in glass cases and carried around as talismans. Clothed but rotted mummified monks are posed upright in Catholic churches in Italy (and are clearly the inspiration for the papery corpses in *The Blind Dead* movies). Naturally mummified monks in several Taiwanese Buddhist temples boast gilded skin. And there are mass storehouses of skulls and bones piled to the roof (often in artistic ways) from monasteries, churches and charnel houses in places such as Germany, Egypt, Greece and Switzerland.

This coffee table-sized hardcover is gorgeously designed and bound, and very reasonably priced at about $40 USD. If you don't add it to your shelf, you may just need to have your own skull checked.

DAVE ALEXANDER

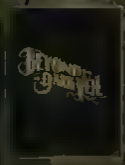
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE MODERN GOTHIC

Jerrold E. Hogle, ed
Cambridge University Press

Cambridge University Press used to be a synonym for serious academic publishing. Not anymore, it seems. Its *Companion to the Modern Gothic* represents a sad example of everything that is wrong with gothic studies today.

The volume opens with an inexusably careless "Chronology" that mentions Carpenter's "*Holloween*" (!), Poe's "Legeia" and a certain "Joss Whedan." The editor's introduction contains an even worse failing which haunts the rest of the volume: he forces nonexistent,

THE GRIM READER



BEYOND THE DARK VEIL

Jack Mord
Grand Central Press & Last Gasp

Jack Mord, creator of the Thanatos Archive (thanatos.net), utilizes images from his repository of vintage post-mortem/mourning photography to reveal a time before we hid death away. Comprised of nearly 200 antique shots with accompanying details, related morbid news clippings and essays on mourning, this beautifully bound tome almost immediately went out of print. It's worth tracking down, even at a collector's price.

DAVE ALEXANDER



THE MONSTER UNDER MY WEB

Charlene Gresham
Authorhouse

Children's stories often warn about the dangers of the world, so it's refreshing to see *The Monster Under My Web* take the opposite approach. It tells the story of Anabel the Arachnid, who wakes up one day to find a monster in the room she calls home. Anabel works to conquer her fears, and discovers that the terrifying beast is, in fact... a toy train. Cute, insightful and valuable in helping build problem-solving skills.

DAVID LIDSTONE



FIVE

Ursula Archer
Minotaur Books

First published in Germany, in 2012, Ursula Archer's taut police procedural makes its North American debut. Detective Inspector Beatrice Kaspary is drawn into a cat-and-mouse game with a serial killer who is leaving clues to the next crime in geocaching coordinated tattoos on the victims' bodies. A gripping psychological thriller with some novel twists and turns.

RON McKENZIE



THE LAST AMERICAN VAMPIRE

Seth Grahame-Smith
Grand Central

Did you know that vampires influenced major American historical events in the past 150 years? True, according to Seth Grahame-Smith's new novel, the sequel to *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter*. Henry Sturges, Lincoln's vampire sidekick, is interviewed by the author himself, Anne Rice-style, telling how he played a vital role in America's history. No towering work of fiction, *The Last American Vampire* is a pleasant, easily digestible diversion.

BRETT McNEILL

ADAM ROCKOFF TAKES A NOSTALGIC TRIP BACK TO THE MOM 'N' POP VIDEO STORES OF HIS ADOLESCENCE – WITH SOME FASCINATING DETOURS ALONG THE WAY

ONE OF US, ONE OF US

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

ADAM ROCKOFF INITIALLY CAME TO *RUE MORGUE*'S ATTENTION IN 2012 WITH HIS ACCLAIMED FIRST BOOK, *GOING TO PIECES: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SLASHER FILM, 1978-1986* (McFarland), an impressive treatise that subsequently spawned a popular documentary feature of the same name. His new effort, *The Horror of It All: One Moviegoer's Love Affair with Masked Maniacs, Frightened Virgins and the Living Dead* (Scribner), has its roots in – and/or owes its existence to – a book about heavy metal by another author and a hand job that never happened.

Equal parts historical overview, critical essay and affectionate memoir, *The Horror of It All* was initially inspired by *Fargo Rock City*, in which author Chuck Klosterman (*Sex, Drugs and Cocoa Puffs*) combines a cultural history of metal music with reminiscences about his teen years.

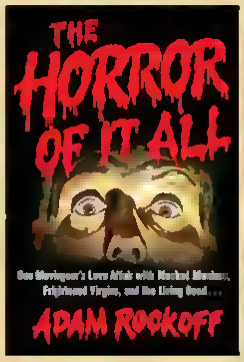
"Out of the blue I was struck by inspiration," Rockoff says, "and I wrote an old-fashioned query letter to Brant Rumble, the editor of *Fargo Rock City* and I said 'Brant, I know this is one thing a writer's never supposed to do – compare his unwritten work to a work of real genius – but what I would like to do is write *Fargo Rock City* about horror movies.' And luckily Brant was also a movie fan and he understood the enormous fan base that's out there for horror movies, and I think he got a kick out of [the fact that] I had the gall to send him the letter."

Rumble agreed to read a sample chapter, urging Rockoff to take a month to pen a hilarious and touching chapter that detailed, among other things, a defining experience of his adolescence: turning down a hand job to watch *Terror on Tape*.

"I sent it to him and he said 'I love it, Adam! Can you do a whole book of this?' It was the easiest, most painless deal I ever signed. Writing the book took less than six months, because it was stuff that I'd always wanted to write."

The chapter in question is titled "Terror On Tape, Or How I Turned Down A Hand Job For Ninety Minutes of Bloodthirsty Mutants, Killer Kids, Homicidal Hillbillies, Demonic Priests and Eurotrash," which sums up much of the book's thesis, and we mean that in a good way. Of course, most of us of a certain vintage have similar stories about early experiences with home video, but Rockoff mixes and matches the anecdotes with some of the sharpest pop culture criticism you'll find in any medium today, delivered with evocative writing that veers between thoughtful, heartfelt and hilarious.

Slasher films were the subject of his first book and they do get their share of ink in *The Horror of It All* as well, but Rockoff also devotes considerable space to most other horror film trends of the later twentieth century and early twenty-first, including zombies, Satanic cinema, torture porn, found-footage mockumentaries, mondo and the persistent urban legend we know as the snuff film. He even gets around to a couple of brief examinations of horror journalism, referring to *Fangoria* and *Rue Morgue* as "the Beatles and the Rolling Stones of horror magazines." (Aw, shucks.)



Of course, it's not all clamshell case memories and teenage makeout dreams – Rockoff also revisits significant episodes such as Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert's laughable crusade against slasher films, which only becomes more absurd upon closer examination, and the rise and fall of the dreaded PMRC (the Parents Music Resource Centre, an American committee formed in 1985 to censor music). In the mid-1980s, a much more sinister period many of us seem to have all but forgotten. Importantly, while his counter-attacks on our enemies are passionate, his arguments are factually solid, calling out Siskel and Ebert for their shoddy research and flimsy hypotheses, and Tipper Gore and her cronies for their thinly-veiled opportunism. Even so, most of Rockoff's reminiscences are as fond as they are vivid.

"When I talk about going to the video store, that's specific to me," he says, "but every single fan out there, early 40s to 60s, remembers those times."

True, but only a select few of those fans could tie it all together so skilfully in a compulsively readable package that's likely to become the most popular non-fiction book horror aficionados will clamour for this year. The freaks have spoken. Rockoff is truly "one of us."



ludicrous meanings onto the texts he's writing about For example, Dr Hogle talks about the Frankenstein monster's "multicolored face" and "*Frankenstein*'s allusions to international slavery and colonization in the signs of them on the creature's face " This in spite of the fact that nowhere in the novel is the creature's face described as stitched or multicolored. Still, the good Dr Hogle keeps projecting stuff, such as homoeroticism in Victor Frankenstein's "attraction to the *man* he imagines he is making," although there is not a tiniest hint of anything sexual in the maker's attachment to his creation

But, for Hogle and his contributors, everything seems to be sexual, and the entire genre is used, willy-nilly, to illustrate "modern" topics such as gender, queering, race, minorities and postcolonialism. There are "arguments" here which would be laughed out of a high school paper – John Paul Riquelme's essay on "Modernist Gothic" contains too many examples to quote. Suffice to say that, for him, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* anticipates *The Walking Dead* because of a few lines which mention the dead soldiers standing on a bridge(!).

Not all the papers are as terrible, but they are either barely relevant ("Contemporary Gothic and the Law," "American Film Noir") or barely competent, and lacking in any new insights. Since their topics are dictated by political correctness and not by aesthetic qualities, it's no wonder that numerous modern gothic masters are not even mentioned (no Aickman, Ligotti, Kiernan, no Ramsey Campbell, no T.E.D Klein), while Lovecraft is, predictably, present only in connection with his attitudes to race. Poor scholarship, forced and biased "arguments" and mediocrity are companions which, just like this book, you should avoid at all costs.

OEJAN OGNJANOVIC

WEIRD FICTION REVIEW VOLUME 5

S T Joshi
Centipede Press

The grand pulp tradition of *Weird Tales* and *Analog Magazine* is alive and well in the pages of *Weird Fiction Review*. Edited by Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi, this annually published celebration of weird and supernatural literature collects short stories, poetry, essays and art, as well as articles and interviews (new and previously published) with a focus on the trendsetters and pioneers of speculative fiction and literature. For its fifth edition, the editorial team has selected an interesting mix of features, old and new, for your enjoyment.



Highlights covering the spectrum of nostalgic and present-day noteworthiness include Dennis Etchison's entertaining 1962 article "Presenting! The Amazing! Ackermonster!," one of the earliest features on the editor of *Famous Monsters*, complete with rare photos from the Ackermansion archives. Also of note is "An End, a Middle and a Beginning: Richard Matheson and His Impact," Jason V. Brock's insightful essay on the influence of one of the genre's most-celebrated writers.

Intertwined with these and other articles (including a look at the history of EC Comics and a comprehensive list of essential contemporary comic reading), *Weird Fiction* also contains numerous short stories and poems. Noteworthy among them are "A Further Experiment in the Effects of Mesmerism," by Brian Stableford, and Robert H. Waugh's old-timey creeper "The Tugboat." And for those who prefer their horror in a more visual vein, the monstrous artwork of Travis Louie is on display, both in an extensive gallery inside the book, as well as on this edition's cover.

Less of an anthology and more of a genre-literature almanac, *Weird Fiction Review* has a little something for anyone interested in literature of the "dark fantastic." Don't be put off by the $35 price tag – this hefty tome more than justifies the cost with the quantity and quality of material inside. There's plenty here to keep you occupied until the next edition comes out later this year.

RON MCKENZIE

LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

It's hard to discern when my obsession with books began, but I do remember that whenever I visited my aunt and uncle's house as a girl I'd end up spending hours gazing at the spines of their extensive collection of leather-bound literary classics. I wasn't allowed to touch these volumes, as they were pricy showpieces, and to this day I don't know if anyone ever read them, but nonetheless they were pivotal to my transformation into an unrepentant bibliophile. It was *that* collection, after all, that I thought of when I bought a hardcover copy of Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1983) at the age of twelve as the first volume in my own library.

I *still* dream of a library like that, stocked with gorgeous, collector's editions. But I'm lucky because there are several genre presses that specialize in exactly these kinds of bindings – if you can afford them, they can range from $50 to many hundreds. Of the volumes I have attained, one of my favourites is Brian Keene's *The Resurrection and the Life* (2007, Biting Dog Press), a novella that rewrites the biblical tale of Jesus and Lazarus, connecting it to the larger zombie mythology of Keene's fiction. The leather-bound book, according to its promo materials, "was created in the style of a medieval manuscript", it features original woodblock art by Georga Walker.


by Brian Keene

My newest addition is Caitlin R. Kiernan's 2012 novel *The Drowning Girl*, recently issued in an oversized cloth-bound, slipcase edition from Centipede Press. Centipede is an industry titan when it comes to collectible literature. To understand my obsession with its releases, one need only to flip through one of the company's art books, for instance *A Lovecraft Retrospective* (see *RM#76*), a hulking 400-page tome that collects decades of Lovecraft-inspired illustrations and reproduces them in the highest quality possible. Centipede puts this same kind of attention to detail into its ongoing *Masters of the Weird Tale* series (featuring classic authors such as Arthur Machen and Edgar Allan Poe) and many of its one-offs, including *The Drowning Girl*: a book about the ultimate in unreliable narrators, a schizophrenic who is struggling with her sense of reality – and the supernatural.

In a time when eBooks have arguably made literature more fleeting and disposable than ever, it brings me great comfort to know there will always be a market for these collector's editions, because if nothing else, it means – hopefully – that hundreds of years from now when all the Kindles and hard drives have failed that *something* will survive to tell the story of horror fiction in early 21st century and beyond. And maybe even inspire another little girl...

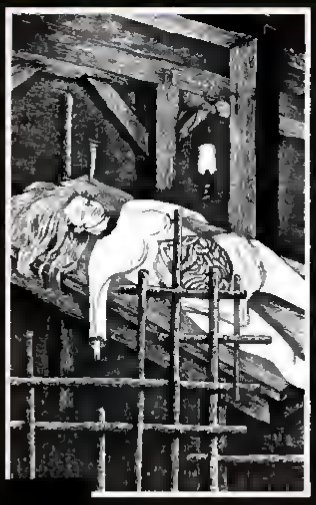
MONICA S. KUEBLER



THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY PULLIN

THIS MONTH: **EXHUMING LEE BROWN COYE**





The name Lee Brown Coye may not ring any bells, but if you're a collector of pulp magazines like Weird Tales or horror anthologies by H.P. Lovecraft, then chances are you'll recognize his nightmarish illustrations. Mostly remembered for his raw, black-and-white style, Coye was a self-taught artist and studied anatomy and even worked as a medical illustrator early in his career, giving him an eye for grim detail. His talent didn't end there; he was also a sculptor, engraver and continued working on projects right up until his death in 1981.

The newly minted *Pulp Macabre: The Art of Lee Brown Coye's Final and Darkest Era* (Feral Press), edited by Sacred Bones Records head Caleb Braaten and author Mike Hunchback, collects the entirety of Coye's output in the '70s and features rare and unpublished work. I caught up with Hunchback to talk about the enigmatic artist.

How do you think Coye's work has influenced the art world today?

Frankly, not at all – but that's not a bad thing, really. Coye's charm is that he was very much an artist (as opposed to an illustrator) working as passionately on his pieces as Bosch did. Only Coye was working for pulp magazines, dooming him to temporary obscurity. I think as he crosses over more, there could be a definite traceable influence, but for now he's still mostly being rediscovered.



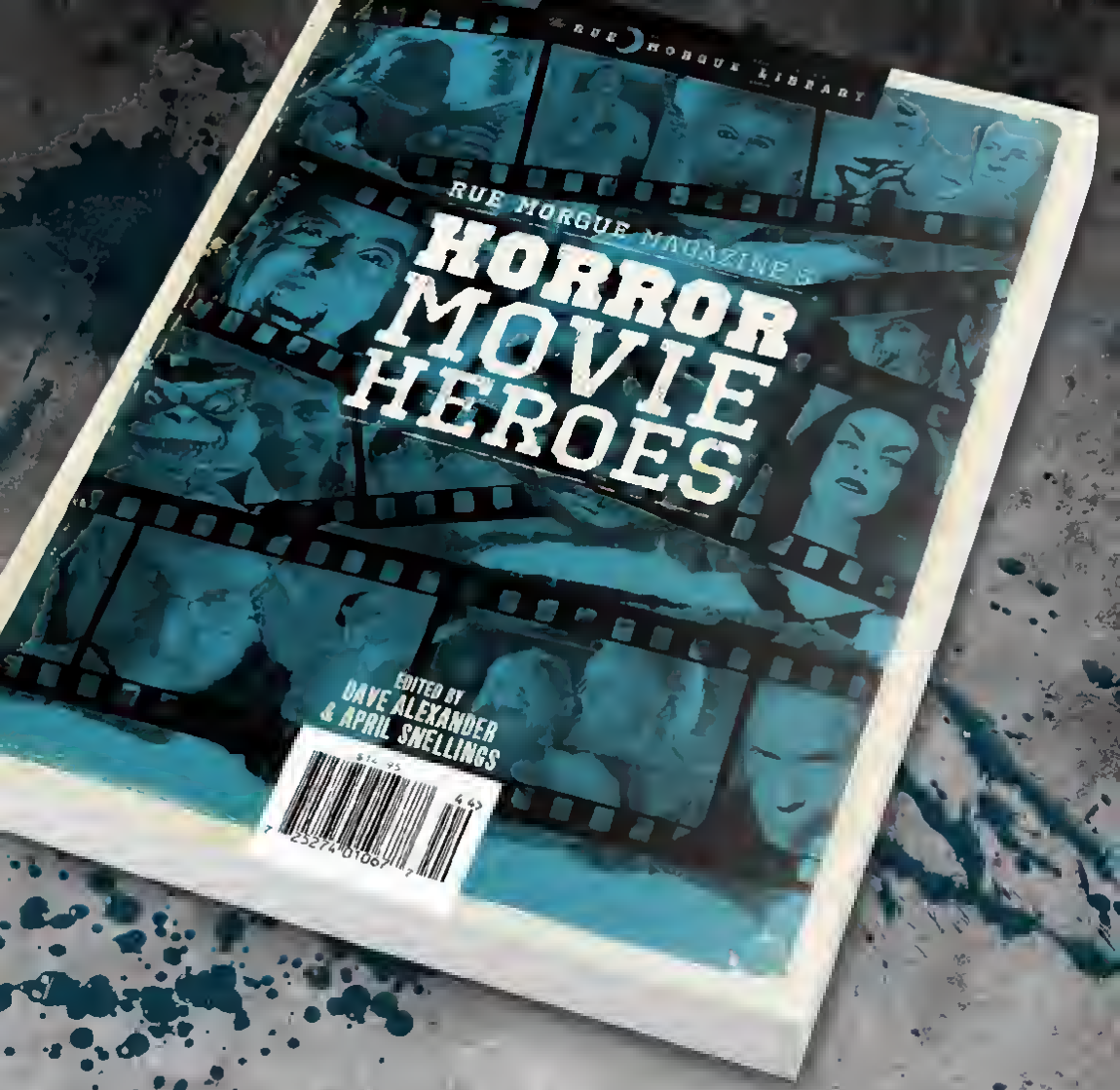
Recurring themes in Coye's work include twigs and the crescent moon. I've read that the twigs come from a memory of a barn that had burned down, but what about the moon?

The story you're referring to is a classic, and creepier than simply a burned down barn. Instead of recounting it myself I'd rather suggest that folks check out Karl Edward Wagner's short story "Sticks," a jaw-dropping piece of Weird Fiction that fully describes the bizarre original event (and beyond). As far as the sickle moon goes, I've always looked at it similarly as a signature. It has the feel of Coye's cold upstate New York origins, but beyond being compelled to repeatedly include it, I don't assume Coye had a specific meaning to it.

Do you think his work is a reflection of a painful life? Or was he just a fan of horror culture?

Like so many greats, I'd say it's a unique combination. As is evidenced by interviews and some of Coye's writing, he was unabashedly drawn to morbidity and dark themes – but he also felt that there was some fun in that. For instance, Coye would several times use his own likeness for reference in some gruesome drawings of hanging corpses or melted faces, and to me they align more with a sick laugh than a cry for help. That said, I think Coye felt that an artist's life – or hang-ups, or fears – should come out somewhere in his or her work. He was a fan of [German Dadaist caricature artist] George Grosz and [German stark realist artist and printmaker] Otto Dix as well as Edgar Allan Poe, and the merging of those tastes is at the heart of why Coye's work is so special.





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THE GORE-MET

MENU: MEAL FOR ONE



Since the last issue, this column turned fifteen years old, I turned 49, and my wife put a bullet in the head of our zombified marriage. It was at the tail end of 1999 that I approached founding editor Rodrigo Gudiño about submitting a film review I hoped he'd print in his magazine. He offered me this column instead. I could never have imagined at the time that, 140 issues later, I'd be writing about my impending divorce.

I've had a lot of time for self-reflection while packing up Casa del Gore-met. I've shared this home with my wife – and later our children – since we moved in the month after that first column was published. We got married a year-and-a-half later and, two years after that, the first of our three children was born. Last rites may have been given to our nuclear family, but it's not a time of mourning. Like Dracula, a stake has been removed from our hearts and we are resurrected.

Even so I can't help but wonder... to what extent did my love of horror play a part in what happened? Gorecentric filmaker Fred Vogel affectionately describes fans of Toetag Pictures as his "sick fucks" and, even though I love Toetag, I've never considered myself "sick." Horror has always been a part of my life, some of my earliest memories include watching *Ultraman*, *Scooby Doo, Where Are You!* and *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein* on TV, but horror doesn't define who I am as a person. I don't "live and breathe" it, as some are wont to say, it's just one of many interests I have. I certainly don't fit a horror fan stereotype, either; I don't have any tattoos or piercings, and I don't like The Misfits. Other than a dresser drawer stuffed with black horror T-shirts, you wouldn't know what I do to look at me.



And yet I never had a girlfriend who was into horror, nor did I marry one. Not that I hid my love for the genre from them or anyone else. In fact, I laid it on the table with the woman who would become my wife on our first date, when we sat down for a cozy romantic evening of *Dead Alive* (1992). She was unfazed and supported my writing career throughout our time together, but she never also came to a screening of *Zombie* or *Maniac* with me. Those things I did on my own, while she did the things she liked to do that I didn't. Slowly, the chasm grew.

When people get married and start a family, societal conventions dictate that they "grow up" and "settle down." Too often that means consigning the rest of your life to a job you loathe while wistfully reminiscing about the fun you used to have, unless you're duking it out in the stands with other parents at some children's house league game, because you choose to live vicariously through your offspring. At the time I got married and started having children, I was making the most significant memories of my life at conventions and screenings. I refused to grow up and settle down, or rather, I refused to subsume myself. When my kids were old enough, they joined me and we made memories together.

I'm far from ashamed of being The Gore-met, but being a horror fan in a society in which you are seriously regarded as a sick fuck for your interests can be a struggle. I experienced a crisis of conscience in 2002 after my daughter was born. I looked at my wall of splatter movies and racks of death metal CDs and briefly contemplated killing off The Gore-met. How could I, in good conscience, raise a child surrounded by this? The answer was simple. I couldn't teach a child to embrace who they are if I wasn't willing to do so myself.

There are no villains in this story. There were no cataclysmic infidelities or apocalyptic battles... just quiet resignation. Horror doesn't inform who I am; it informs how I look at life. Horror is not a celebration of the macabre, it's a celebration of being alive that those who don't dabble in the dark just can't understand. I may be splitting up with the woman I vowed to spend the rest of my life with, but at least I'm not duct-taped to a chair while my face is torn off with a belt sander, or running through the woods from a maniac with a skin mask and a chainsaw. To twist a quote from *Flesh for Frankenstein*, "To know life, Otto, you have to fuck death in the gall bladder."



SALES *from the* CRYPT

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AUDIO DROME

DEADLY DEVASTATING DECENT DULL DAMN! DOA DEAD ON ARRIVAL

LEE MOORE, SEAN PLUMMER AND JON STEFFENS



BAD MILO!

SOUNDTRACK

Ted Masur

MovieScore Media

Perhaps at the insistence of the film's director, Ted Masur's *Bad Milo!* score kicks off with a not-so-subtle homage to Danny Elfman's *Beetlejuice*, but from there the cues are clever theme variations that show off Masur's sharp orchestrations, fusing electronics and classical orchestral elements for this witty, mordant score. Using a wide selection of instrumental emulations, Masur's cues are quirky without being obvious or cloying, and they're invigorated with tightly wound energy, giving the soundtrack a continuous momentum and highlighting the film's ridiculous premise of a demonic creature borne from a man's intestines. The score also features strong dynamics between quiet and strategic bursts of bombast and fast-shifting moods ranging from gnarled orchestral clusters to tender theme variations on keyboard ("Sock Puppets" is a perfect example of Masur walking a fine line between pathos and the ridiculous). MovieScore Media's mastering is once again first-rate. ★★★½ MRH



ROCKY GRAY

SOUNDTRACK

Accursed

(Independent)

Rocky Gray wanders the musical map, having played drums for Evanescence and currently lending his guitar skills to Living Sacrifice and Even Devils Die. He now throws his hat into the fake soundtrack ring with *Accursed*, an album that takes on spookshow scores with an intriguing mixture of styles... including the metal-influenced vintage video game music of "Cannibal" and "Undead," the streamlined spookiness of "High Hopes" and "Cemetery Ghoul," and the John Carpenter-esque "Are You Alone." Gray's talents truly command attention on the synth-heavy "Lovecraftian" and "Getting Away With Murder," both of which evoke not only '70s and '80s horror, but also sci-fi and action movies from those eras. *Accursed* functions not only as a worthy faux-soundtrack effort, but also proof that Gray has the musical chops and genre sensibilities to be a film composer in his own right. ★★★½ LLM



TWIZTID

HIP-HOP

The Darkness

Magik Ninja Entertainment

After nearly two decades in the game, Detroit horrorcore duo Twiztid has shattered any notion that having an obsessive love for horror movies, comic books and hip hop won't take you anywhere good. Unlike their previous attempts – which at times felt comedic – *The Darkness* is a vigorous and dynamic collection of tracks that make for a wide-ranging yet focused record. "Boogieman" exemplifies the best elements of the group's evolution: it's catchy, well produced and crammed with campy horror movie references. On the other end of the spectrum, the industrial and grunge-laden single "Back to Hell," sounds like it was pulled from the mind of Trent Reznor circa '94 and showcases some of the group's most venomous verses to date. *The Darkness* represents a full shift to Independance for Twiztid but is by no means a departure from their ingrained style and should expose them to new crowds without alienating fans. ★★★½ AM



SHADOW WINOHAWK AND THE MORTICIANS

PUNK

Casket Spray EP

Black Flame Records

Pressed on translucent candy corn-coloured vinyl with artwork by Tim Jacobus (of *Goosebumps* fame) and featuring songs about *Nightbreed*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and Michael Myers, the *Casket Spray EP* is a labour of love intended for the monster kid in us all. Sonically, its mix of catchy punk and gothic croon is entirely familiar, but instead of being a redundant rehash, this offering emits a pleasant nostalgia that immediately takes you back to the time you smelled the pungent latex of your first rubber mask, or felt the autumnal wind on October 31st. With a sound you've heard a thousand times before, but played with an eager enthusiasm and conviction that is entirely refreshing, Shadow Windhawk and the Morticians live for the horror, and they want you to know that it's okay if you do too. ★★★½ JS



HORROR SECTION/ EATEN BACK TO LIFE

PUNK

Split in Two

Eccentric Pop Records

Horror punk bands usually fail because they keep making the same fatal mistake: they try way too hard to be the Misfits. Horror Section and Eaten Back to Life (both from the St. Louis area) take a different approach and glean inspiration from classic Lookout Records bands. The Queers and Screeching Weasel and for the most part, it works. Horror Section is the more lighthearted of the two, and what its simplistic bubblegum-and-karo-syrup formula lacks in

GOBLIN

SOUNDTRACK

Beyond The Darkness

Cherry Red Records



Goblin will be forever celebrated by horror fans for its spooky spectacular scores to Dario Argento's iconic 70s films but *Beyond the Darkness* makes the case that there's more to the Italian prog rockers than meets the Italian maestro's eye, highlighting their music for non-Argento films. Goblin completists will salivate at the band's music from crime dramas such as *The Heroin Busters*, Richard Franklin's Aussie classic *Patrick*, Luigi Cozzi's *Contamination* and more. Some of the tracks are appropriately creepy but, as is always the case with Goblin, the music isn't obviously dark – prog rock, funk, jazz, disco, and even delicate guitar ballads all find a place here. Claudio Simonetti's liner notes give a rundown of the various incarnations of the band, whose history and various line-ups are notoriously complex. The package wouldn't be complete with a touch of giallo, and also includes music for Argento's *Phenomena* and *Sleepless*). A showcase for Goblin's tremendous musical talents, *Beyond the Darkness* is also a necessary document of the most important band in horror. ★★★★ LLM

LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

Pittsburgh space rock duo Zombi was quite the novelty when they arrived in the early 2000s. Hailing from the land of George A. Romero and Tom Savini, and named after one of the quintessential zombie films, they focussed on a sound heavily-influenced by early Carpenter and Tangerine Dream. There was little else out there that was quite like Zombi. And although they eventually left the world of faux-horror soundtrack music for more progressive soundscapes, the warm buzz and epic atmosphere of '70s and '80s horror has remained a staple of their sound.

This month, Relapse Records reissues *The Zombi Anthology*, comprised of the band's self-released demo and *Twilight Sentinel* EP, recordings made over ten years ago. It showcases them as the true gore horror soundtrack practitioners they once were.



"The first half of the *Anthology* – our first self-titled album – was definitely meant to sound like music from some lost '70s or '80s horror/sci-fi movie," says Steve Moore, the man behind the bass and synths. "[Drummer] A.E Paterra and I both grew up on John Carpenter, Goblin, Howard Shore, Brad Fiedel and Vangelis scores."

Moore also affirms their affinity for the German electronic music innovators Tangerine Dream, and founder Edgar Froese, who recently passed away (see this month's music feature).

"Tangerine Dream is probably my favourite band," he says, noting that the classic group became a more direct influence starting with Zombi's 2006 album *Surface to Air*. "I think their mid-'70s studio albums like *Phaedra* and *Stratosfear* were what we were really into, more than their soundtracks. My favourite score of theirs, however, is *Firestarter*, but that's subject to change without notice."

Zombi were innovators themselves, using the horror movie score as a basis to make original music. Today, that innovation has become commonplace, as more and more independent artists capitalize on a renewed interest in horror soundtracks as a musical genre.

"It comes down to three simple things," says Moore. "The music is good, it is now readily available on the internet, and there is a proliferation of labels dedicated to releasing genre scores."

But how exactly does one go about writing a score for a movie that doesn't exist?

"We don't sit down and write music based on a scene," he says. "It's more like this: some guys get together to form a band and they love Black Sabbath. So the guitarist buys an SG and Laney stack and they write slow, riff-heavy blues rock. Now what if, instead, those guys were super into John Carpenter? They buy all the Sequential Circuits synthesizers they can afford – not many – and write dark, propulsive and moody synth music using the tropes of '70s genre movies in place of riffs."

Presumably, it helps if you've got a natural affinity for blood.

"Writing music while watching women get murdered by a black gloved killer is only *not* super creepy when it's a job you've been hired to do," says Moore. "Come to think of it, even then it's still pretty creepy."

AARON VDN LUPTON

technical prowess is made up for in fun catchy songwriting – the kind that gets the chorus clawing into your head. Eaten Back to Life differs little in style, but sports gruffer vocals, more guitar solos and more instantly memorable lyrics. It's all very cheesy and cliche, but *Split in Two* is old school pop punk done right. Add a horror movie T-shirt to your black leather jacket/Chuck Taylors combination and get hopping. ★★★½ **AVL**



BLOOD FARMERS

METAL

Headless Eyes

PATAC RECORDS

Named after the 1972 exploitation mess *Invasion of the Blood Farmers*, this New York trio sticks to what it does best on its newest vinyl platter (the first since 1995's self-titled full-length debut). Expect no frills, molasses-thick doom metal drenched in menace, draped in a psychedelic fog and sprinkled with an atmosphere of occult dread. The title track kicks off the horror with ominous interplay between demonic samples and devilish lyrics, while "The Creeper" comes across like the soundtrack for a late-'60s black mass that Geezer Butler forgot to attend. "The Night of the Sorcerers" practically begs for Amando de Ossorio's Blind Dead to claw their way through your speakers before the album closes with a cover of David Hess' sombre "The Road Leads to Nowhere," leaving a bloody taste of *Last House on the Left*. Doom on. ★★★★ **JS**



SAVAGE MASTER

METAL

Mask of the Devil

SKOL RECORDS

Rock 'n' roll outlaw Adam Neal (Hookers, Brothers of Conquest) and the seductively sadistic Stacey Savage offer the leather-clad Luciferian hordes an album steeped in the traditional themes of classic heavy metal (namely Satan, lust, violence and horror). Bridging the gap between dark forebears Hellion, early Mercyful Fate and the punked-up attitude of the Plasmatics, these killers from Kentucky ooze more menace than most of their more lyrically explicit or sonically aggressive peers. Songs such as "The Mystifying Oracle," "Kill Without Warning" and "Marry The Wolf" caulterize the ears with incendiary guitars reminiscent of Judas Priest, while Savage's vocals at once command and caress. The eight-song album ends appropriately (but far too soon) with "Death Rides the Highway." Pray that metal's new Satanic saviours come to your hometown soon. ★★★½ **JS**



LORDI

METAL

Scare Force One

AFM RECORDS

S(c)h(l)ock rockers Lordi give 'er on *Scare Force One*, their seventh studio album and a scarily strong follow-up to last year's *To Beast or Not to Beast*. Famous for monster costumes (designed by frontman Mr. Lordi), the Finnish quintet continues to stitch together epic heavy metal anthems punctuated by eerie keyboard riffs and grinding guitars. Mr. Lordi has a cat-killing wail he uses to evil effect (most predominantly on the title track) when he's not growling about loving the dead ("Cadaver Lover"), infernal funnymen ("Hell Sent in the Clowns"), groupie sex ("Nailed by the Hammer of Frankenstein") and being besotted by the fallen ("She's a Demon"). It's a balls-to-the-wall metal maelstrom with just enough humour to keep things fun, as well as furious. Even the maddeningly misogynistic "How to Slice a Whore" (really?) gets a pass for being the album's standout track, thanks to an insanely catchy chorus. ★★★ **SP**

IN HONOUR OF RECENTLY DECEASED FOUNDER EDGAR WILMAR FROESE, WE REVISIT TANGERINE DREAM'S INFLUENTIAL HORROR SOUNDTRACK WORK FROM THE 1980s



darkest dreams

BY AARON VON LUPTON

THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC SCENE LOST A LEGEND ON JANUARY 20, 2015 WHEN TANGERINE DREAM FOUNDER AND SOLE CONTINUAL MEMBER EDGAR WILMAR FROESE DIED AT AGE 70.

Formed in Germany in 1967, the band experimented with moog synthesizers and sequencers, becoming a huge influence on electronic music – including ambient, dance and new wave – in the ensuing decades.

Horror fans will remember Tangerine Dream for its nerve-rattling scores, usually characterized by dark analog synthesizers, dreamy ambience and hypnotic droning. John Carpenter often cites the group's score for William Friedkin's 1977 thriller *Sorcerer* as highly influential on his own musical career, and indeed, that release essentially launched the group's career in movies during the '80s. In honour of Froese's passing, we present a look at Tangerine Dream's horror soundtracks throughout that decade.



STRANGE BEHAVIOR (1981)

Snuggled in between a handful of pop and post-punk tunes in this New Zealand film about mad science and murdered teenagers, you'll find one of Tangerine Dream's first horror scores.

It's chock-full of the group's signature dark ambiance – a lush palette of drones, electronic noise, and warm organ rumblings. Never officially released, *Strange Behavior* (a.k.a. *Dead Kids*) can be enjoyed as an isolated score on Synapse's 2008 DVD, though spacing between the tracks doesn't make for an ideal listen. Not exactly a landmark moment in the history of horror soundtracks, *Strange Behavior* nevertheless stands as a prime example of how Tangerine Dream's forward thinking music can elevate a mostly forgettable film.



THE KEEP (1983)

Michael Mann's cult classic about Nazis reawakening an ancient Romanian evil rises to epic proportions thanks to an incredible soundtrack. The music is delightfully ingenious, all dark atmosphere with frequent liturgical ambience, kicking off with music for a mass composed circa 1554. The score then shifts direction to rise into heroic soundscapes that'll make your hair stand on end. For some reason, this was never officially released until a 1997 UK concert (where a run of 150 copies were sold), followed by a re-release of 300 copies in 1999 (the CD can be found online for over $100). If that doesn't make the score obscure enough, *The Keep* has never even seen a DVD or Blu-ray release, although streaming services do offer it with Tangerine Dream's music intact. Only four tracks from the official release are actually in the film, since so much material was cut from the movie's original three-hour running time.



SPASMS (1983)

A Canadian film that stars Oliver Reed as a man who shares a psychic link with a giant serpent set free by snake-worshipping Satanists, *Spasms* proves that no film was too ridiculous for Tangerine Dream. That said, the band's music actually only appears during the end credits: a tune that's Carpenter-esque in its suspense. In some ways, this is the most '80s-sounding score Tangerine Dream ever made. Again, good luck finding it, as the track appears only on the bootleg CD *70/90* (which goes for about $400) and more "officially" on a fan project release *Tangerine Tree 88: Assorted Secrets 5*. *Spasms* is not the band's most essential work, but it's another bright spot in a terrible film.



FIRESTARTER (1984)

Perhaps Tangerine Dream's most underrated horror score is for Mark Lester's adaption of Stephen King's famous pyrokinetic tale *Firestarter*. As the group's most mainstream horror title, it suitably boasts big-sounding production and carries a more commercial new wave influence. Fans will recognize similarities between the atmosphere of this album and their highly-praised 1984 effort *Poland*. Smooth ambience creates a meditative state, which gives way to more action-oriented, high energy tracks. *Firestarter* manages to function as a soundtrack, an album and as relaxation music. Best of all, it's easy to find at a price that won't light your wallet on fire.



NEAR DARK (1987)

Kathryn Bigelow's outlaw vampire yarn boasts badass tunes from The Cramps and George Strait, but is better remembered for the sublime atmosphere provided by Tangerine Dream. That said, Froese also unexpectedly picked up the axe and added some rock guitar tunes of his own, such as the dated pop rock song "Caleb's Blues," "Mae's Theme," on the other hand, provides a classic example of the band's musical power, transforming a relatively ordinary scene in which the protagonist first meets his vampy girlfriend into the film's most beautiful moment. Credit much of *Near Dark*'s enduring emotional resonance to a score infused with the atmosphere of late summer nights on this easy-to-find, affordable soundtrack.

PLAY DEAD



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DYING LIGHT

PS4, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows, Linux

Techland/Warner Bros.



Like all things zombie, rotter video games have been feeling a bit played out. With the *Dead Rising* and *Left 4 Dead* franchises successfully milking the monster to (un)death and 2013's *State of Decay* cornering the survival aspect of an undead apocalypse, what could a new triple-A title bring to the deaders that we haven't seen before? Answer: parkour. That said, *Dying Light* will continuously remind you of other franchises, from the melee weapon-crafting (*Dead Rising*), to the varieties of special infected (*Left 4 Dead*), to the music (one cue in particular sounds as if it was directly lifted from *Mass Effect*). Still, *Dying Light* manages to mash all of these borrowed pieces into an incredibly fun and challenging gaming experience.

You play as an undercover operative who has been dropped into the zombie-infested city of Harran to root out a stolen file, which means having to infiltrate and do missions for the various groups of survivors in order to track down the thief. Unfortunately, the story is nowhere as compelling as the game play.

Still, the zombie combat feels real. It's best not to tangle with more than two or three, lest your weapon break from overuse, and night time – the game runs on a 24-hour clock – is seriously terrifying, as the stronger, meaner, faster zombies chase you through the city in near pitch-black darkness. Yes, *Dying Light* has made zombies frightening again and, after ten-plus years of zombie games, that's no small feat.

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NIHILUMBRA

PS Vita

BeautiFun Games



Originally released on iOS and PC in 2012, BeautiFun has revised *Nihilumbra* for the touchscreen capabilities of the PlayStation Vita. The game's dark, minimalist artwork, clever puzzles and plentiful deathtraps are sure to draw comparison to *Limbo*, but our playable hero (known simply as "Born") has novel skills at his disposal to help him avoid the gruesome creatures and hazards that lie ahead. While the setting and storyline are decidedly bleak, the game feels like a bit of a finger-painting project, thanks to its puzzle elements that make use of the touch screen to draw colours of various platforms in order to manipulate the environments (using the power of ice to slick surfaces and build up momentum, for example).

Emerging from "the Void" as little more than an inquisitive blob, Born's initial task is to navigate his surreal side-scrolling environment and dodge nasty creatures, but mastery of platforming action will only get him so far – he learns a new ability to combat the challenges in each environment, and it takes some cunning to navigate the obstacles at hand. The real test comes in the final act of each segment, in which Born must survive an auto-scrolling chase while the Void attempts to re-consume him.

It's rewarding to see our hero go from helplessly avoiding his enemies to ruthlessly destroying them. *Nihilumbra* is a satisfying puzzler that makes great use of the Vita's touchscreen technology, and this version is sure to please both new players and those returning to the title in the new format. It's a short, pensive adventure that's easily completed in one sitting, making it right at home among the Vita's library of quirky indie platforming games.

SHAUN HATTON

READSHOTS NOVEL CONCEPT. GOOD INTEGRATION OF TOUCHSCREEN AND TRADITIONAL CONTROLS.
MISFIRES QUICK TO COMPLETE. HEAVYHANDED "PEOPLE DESTROYED OUR WORLD" NARRATIVE.



RESIDENT EVIL HD REMASTER

PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC
Capcom



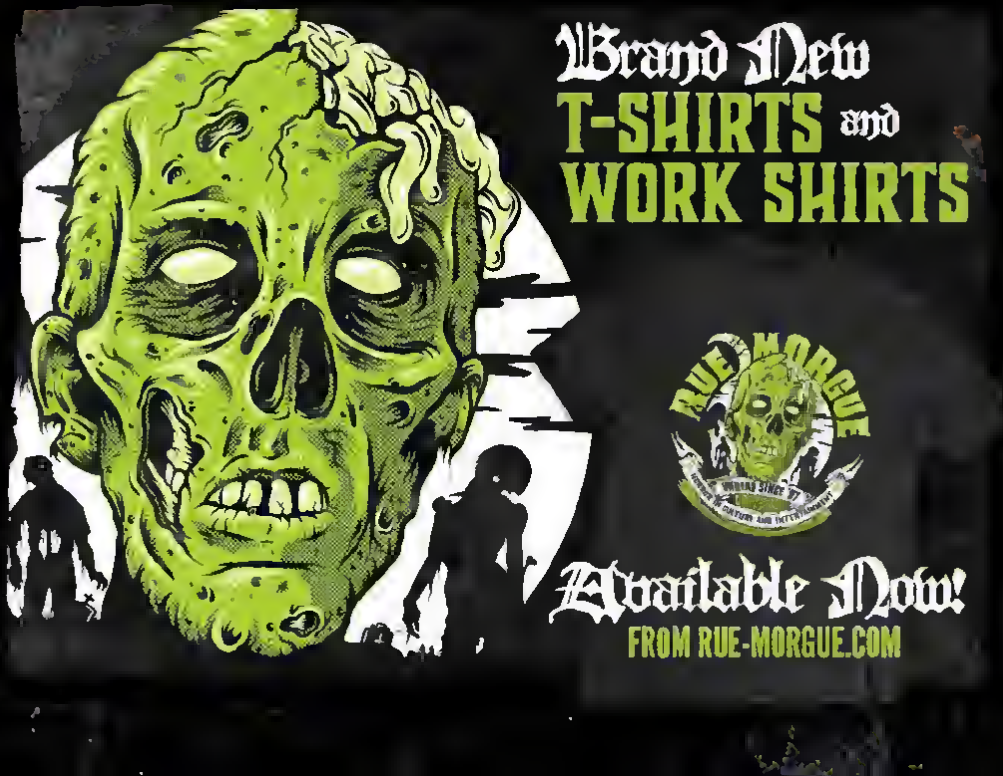
With each new entry into the *Resident Evil* series, the franchise has further distanced itself from its resource-management roots in favour of action-heavy game play. Fortunately, Capcom decided to give the original title a shiny new coat of paint, thanks to a visually remastered treatment and new optional control scheme.

Resident Evil follows Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield, two members of the S.T.A.R.S. Alpha team who find themselves in a mysterious mansion full of creepy creatures, disturbing notes, and elaborately trap-laden puzzles. Choosing to play as either Jill or Chris will reveal different narratives throughout the game, ultimately exposing the true nature of the zombie outbreak and Umbrella Corporation's involvement. While the carefully crafted scares and tight, restricted camera angles seem dated now, they remain effective at delivering the goods.

The game's 3D assets have been remastered for this re-release, but the static backgrounds appear to have merely been upscaled, and in certain camera shots this ruins the illusion of a cohesive room and betrays which items, if any, can be interacted with. The new controls are also a bit of bummer for those masochists among us who appreciated the difficulty of the original game (auto-aim is cheating!). But these drawbacks don't detract from the fact that the *Resident Evil* that started it all remains a touchstone in survival horror gaming, and retains many of the features that fans love. You'll still have to be smart about which items to carry with you, you'll still get chills when you see that first zombie... and you'll still laugh at the terrible voice acting.

SHAUN HATTON

HEADSHOTS: OLD-SCHOOL SLOW PACING, CREEPY SCORE AND CREATURE DESIGN
MISFIRES: MUDDY BACKGROUNDS, OBTUSE PUZZLES, TERRIBLE VOICE ACTING



CLASSIC CUT

EDDIE THE HEAD

DEREK RIGGS/IRON MAIDEN ☠ UK – 1980

From his first appearance as a primordial stage prop to his ubiquitous dominance of album and promotional art, "Eddie the Head" became the face of British metal band Iron Maiden, arguably the most enduring (and endearingly horrific) mascot in the history of heavy metal music, and an indispensable icon that solidified the bond between metal and the macabre.

Eddie's beginnings were humble, he debuted as a creepy *papier-mâché* mask that hung at the back of the stage during the band's earliest shows, spewing fake blood via a pump rigged up to a fish tank.

As the story goes, manager Ron Smallwood became convinced that Maiden needed an eye-catching image on its first album cover, to help move records. Enter illustrator Derek Riggs, who had painted a spec piece for a punk rock record that caught Smallwood's attention. He was suitably impressed, but asked Riggs to add hair so the image looked more "metal" and less punk. That's more or less how the iconic artwork for Iron Maiden's eponymous debut album (1980) came to be.





While Iron Maiden's lyrics often took the band to dark places (a hellish dream in "Number of the Beast" or homicide in the streets of Paris in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"), Eddie brought to life the imagery that was buried in the lyrics. In Riggs' hands, Eddie became a Satanic puppet-master for the band's top selling *Number of the Beast* album and a murderer for the band's *Killers* album; he even stabbed then-British PM Margaret Thatcher in the cover art for the single "Sanctuary."

The cadaverous creature evolved with each of Maiden's releases, often shifting from one genre icon to another, a shrouded mummy for *Powerslave* (1984), a Terminator-esque cyborg for *Somewhere in Time* (1986), a zombie bursting out of a grave for 1990's *No Prayer for the Dying* and the Grim Reaper himself in *Dance of Death* (2003).

Even so, Eddie wasn't the first monstrous mascot of metal. Motörhead's "warpig" snaggletooth has graced their album covers since 1977, and the Misfits' Crimson Ghost evolved roughly around the same time as Maiden's beastie. But Eddie was more than a mere mascot; he was elevated from a simple branding tool to an icon on par with a professional sports team. Not surprisingly, Eddie now joins the band on stage as a giant puppet who staggers out in a frenzy of guitar riffs and stage gore during the track "Iron Maiden."

Eddie's iconic rise in metal music should come as no surprise considering what was happening in other horror media at the same time. Maiden emerged in the early 1980s, the same time that icons like Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees were reinvigorating the genre with a run of new characters on par with the Universal Monsters of time past. Like Krueger in particular, Eddie embodied an old tradition of gallows humour. His diabolical hi-jinx may have raised the ire of a few conservative critics, but as bandleader Bruce Dickinson has noted in the 1993 book *Iron Maiden. Infinite Dreams* (by Dave Bowler and Bryan Dray), "Eddie's not to be taken seriously... There's no way that it's anything other than a good laugh. Gory imagery for sensationalism's sake has been around for a long time, back as far as Grand Guignol theatre".

As movie icons of the 1980s were dragging horror into the mainstream, so too was Eddie paving the way for horror-themed branding in popular music. By 1983, it was okay for Michael Jackson to don werewolf and zombie duds for the MTV hit "Thriller." Meanwhile, in a 2004 poll from teeshirtstore.com, Eddie emerged as the most popular rock n' roll T-shirt design – from a survey of thousands. Such is his visibility that a video game, *Ed Hunter* (1999), was developed around him, and he even guest starred as an unlockable feature in Tony Hawk's *Pro Skater 4* (2002). He continues to grace the band's album covers and merchandise, appearing as a space alien on the 2010 LP *The Final Frontier*.

Some 35 years after he appeared glowering at listeners from the cover of the debut Iron Maiden album, Eddie endures as one of rock music's most monstrous and beloved icons.

JEFF SZPIRGLAS

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